Greetings from

MOUSE HEAVEN

A Guided Tour of
THE MEL BIRNKRANT COLLECTION

VOLUME THREE

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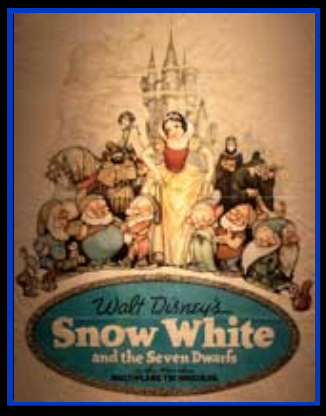

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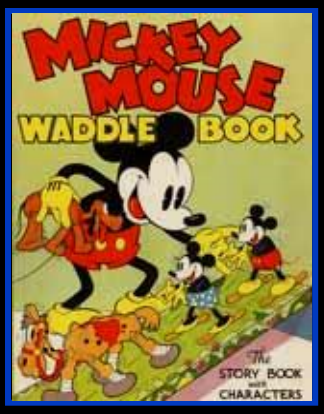

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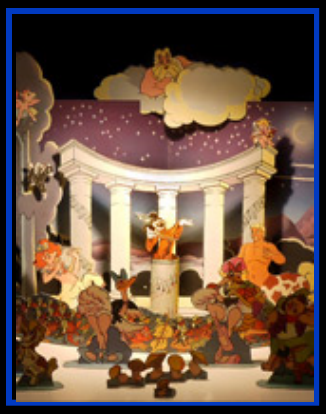

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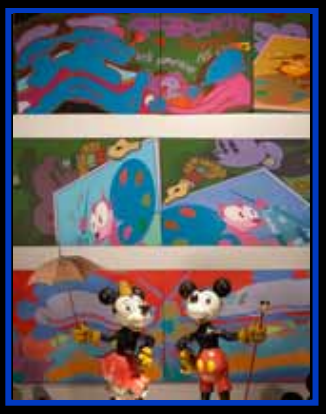

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UPPER CASES

On the Great Wall of china, wood, tin, cloth, and celluloid, we have passed over several cases, some major, some minor. Now, the time has come to visit them. This, alas, is not a sign that the tour is coming to an end. The fact is, we are about two-thirds done. But, nonetheless, some of the largest and most difficult showcases are behind us. I'm hoping for some easier ones ahead. Looking around me, daily, at all the things we missed, I fear the trip upstairs, again, is going to be a big one. Meanwhile, here is a showcase, right up front, that's easy to access.

It is a fairly major one. There are some treasures in it of the sort that are sought by many, and also some trifles of the kind that appeal only to me. If I had to sum up what this showcase is about, I'd say, "the colors Red and Green." Predominately red stuff is on the right, and on the left, is mostly green. These are two colors that were prominent in products featuring early Mickey. Many of the timepieces, especially, were painted in a color I came to refer to as "Mickey Green". On the left half, are the three Mickey Clocks, both of the wind up versions, and the Electric one. Yes, I got an electric clock, after all. It is mint in the original red box, which is, therefore, on the right. The red Big Bad Wolf Clock is on the right, as well. Meanwhile, in the middle, where the colors meet, are two toys that combine them both. The Marx Bros. Piano, with figures of Mickey and Minnie that dance to the music, and a wooden German pull toy, with a walking action, very much like the Felix Frolic.

Here are several Borgfeldt wood jointed dolls, green Mickey, red Minnie, in their exceedingly rare original boxes. Those put me in the red, for weeks! Here too, are two Mickey-Minnie handcars in red and green. And two sizes of the game that proclaims, in both red and green, "Let Them All Come", a standing invitation to Mickeys everywhere! On the far right, is a Hopi Kachina doll, carved in the image of Mickey Mouse, another gift from Kenneth Anger. And, on the shelf in front, partly for lack of a better place to put them, and partly because they echo the color scheme, are the Hubley Popeye Motorcycle and the Arcade Andy Gump car we saw earlier. On either side, are the Mickey and Donald lamps.

The Donald Duck lamp is not only rare, but the circumstances, surrounding its acquisition, are rarer still. Around 1975, it appeared in Collectors News, which, by some Miracle, I got early that week, and I immediately called the lady. The price was ridiculously low. I was the first to call. I insisted that I send her twice what she was asking. This wasn't merely generosity. I knew she would get other calls, and one unscrupulous competitor, in particular, would do his best to screw me. There was no way she would accept my offer. But, I did it anyway. She sent me both the lamp and a refund check. Would that more, in this World, had such integrity.

Oh, I am amending this page. I just discovered a dynamic photo that shows how this Mickey Case, and the Popeye case, above it, go together, and relate to each other. This is the next best thing to being there. I'll move some things around, and fit this photo in. Here it is!

High Up, almost out of sight and reach, is the Donald Duck Department. I guess that's saying something. You'll notice that all the Donalds there have a tendency to be of the "Long Billed" variety. Disney collectors of my generation tend to be, either Mickey Mouse, or Donald Duck men. Those, who favor Donald, are generally focused on the creative output of the great Carl Barks. They, no doubt, grew up, reading his comics, and still enjoy them today. Their collecting tends to be driven by nostalgia. Barks was one of the World's greatest illustrators and story tellers, but his Duck, although beautifully rendered, is more about personality, and telling a story than it is about form and iconic imagery. Those who favor Mickey are often more visually oriented. Like me, they, most likely, didn't even see early Mickey as a kid. Many of the first Mickey Mouse collectors were artists. Mickey is a visual thing.

Only early long billed Donald remotely belonged to Mickey's World of pure Geometry, a world where circles were still easily detectible. Donald, at his visual best, is embodied in the Hestwood marionette. His head is a perfect circle; and his abdomen is an egg. And, then, there is that ridiculously long beak. That is the ideal Donald that was, also, beautifully realized in the Donald Lamp on the left of the shelf of red and green, above. The shelf below, represents most of the long Billed Donald products known, those that were not either Bisque or Celluloid, two categories, in which Donald prospered and multiplied. They are displayed, elsewhere.

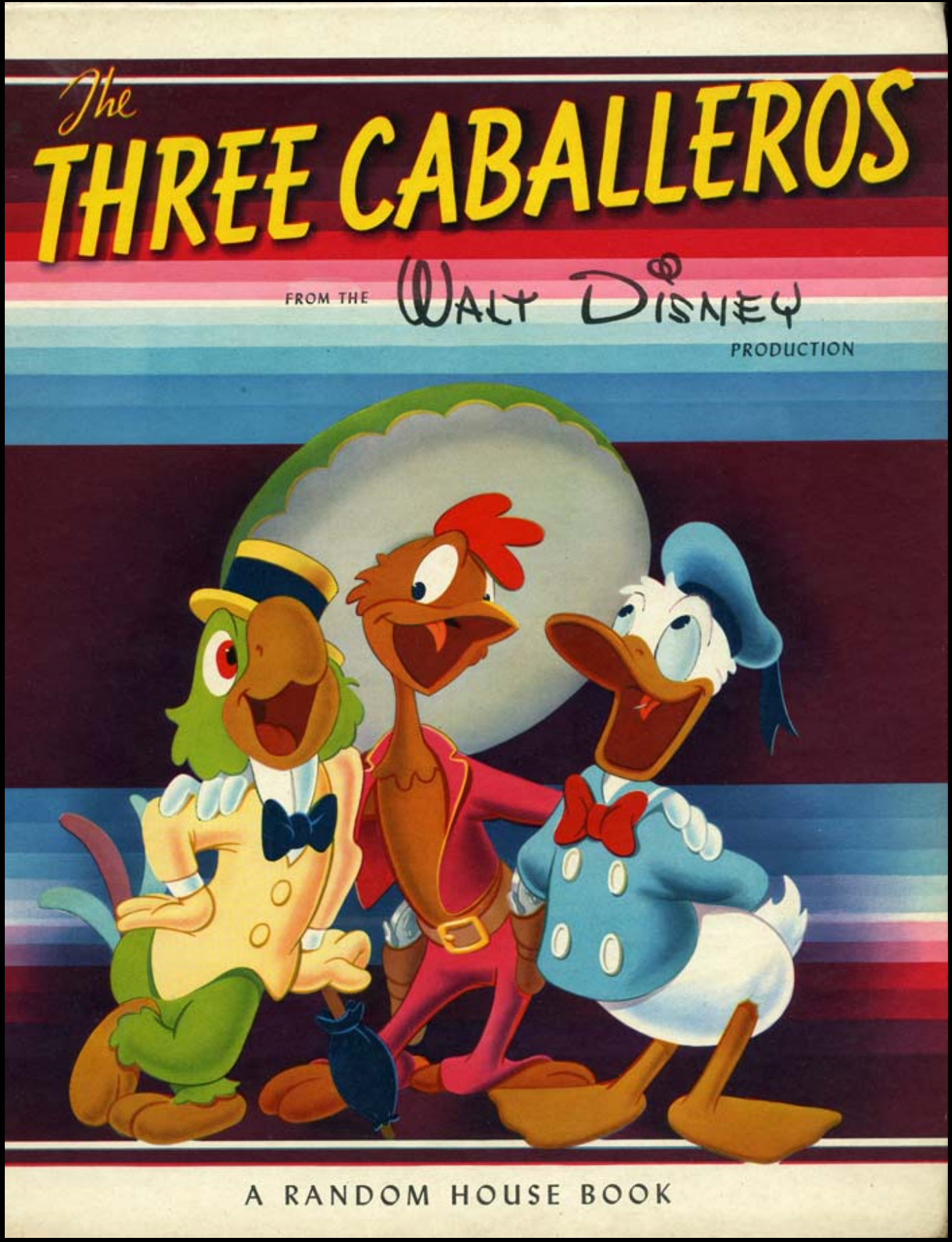
Here are the two Lionel Donald Handcars, both paint variations. The paint is flaking off the figures, even as we watch. I was never into Lionel boxes, and keep them out of sight, but here the two boxes serve as handy platforms to rest a flock of Donalds on. if anything in this showcase is rare or unusual, I would suggest the Italian ceramic in the middle. When I visited Disney licensing in 1969, Lou Lispi the art director, at the time, had a set of these in four different poses. They were great. I got this one from Hakes, early on. His neck has been repaired. Several years later, I learned that Lou's set had been stolen! What? Well, the time line is such that this cannot be one of them.

The two plush dolls on the ends are French. Merci, Pierre! And all three sizes of Wade Heath pitchers are there. There are several oilcloth dolls by Kruger, my favorite being the big one in the middle. There is another one, upstairs. It is velvet and oilcloth combined. Here, also, is a Schuco long-billed windup, and several surviving Seiberlings. The more you study this case, the more you see, including a plush doll by Deans. That's about it for Donald. Apart from Clarence Nash's ventriloquist doll, I can't think of any more I "need".

The two last classic Disney features, "Bambi" and "Dumbo," were tearjerkers that became the acid test for stiff upper lips of my generation. You could pretty much judge your age and degree of maturity by which of these two movies reduced you to a puddle of tears. Sadder still, was the great Disney depression that followed. Something had gone wrong. A strike at the studio? The impact of the War? Walt fought back by doing all sorts of stuff for the War effort. And beyond that, the studio encouraged relations with our neighbors in South America by making two films that for a kid, like me, were the equivalent of K-rations, just enough to barely sustain you, until you were old enough to put Disney behind you. Alas, that age came late for me.

These two animated travelogues, “Saludos Amigos”, and “There Caballeros”, were slim pickings. They smacked of propaganda, lauding the joys of South America. And they generated no products, whatsoever, beyond a couple of books and jigsaw puzzles. On the shelves of Grinnell’s music store in Detroit, there were two record albums of Latin music, one for each film. Of course, I had to have them, and made myself listen to them. You Belong to My Heart, Now and Forever” is permanently imprinted on my brain. The three smiling faces on the cover, the only Disney thing about it, hooked me.

The Stars of The Three Caballeros, Donald Duck, Panchito and Jose Carioca had a certain upbeat, even exotic, aura about them that in images, like the delicious cover of this book, was captivating



But, apart from a few figurines that my mother, ultimately, pulverized, I saw no products until years later, as a collector, when a precious few appeared. They are all up here, crammed into a showcase that is really too small to fit them all.

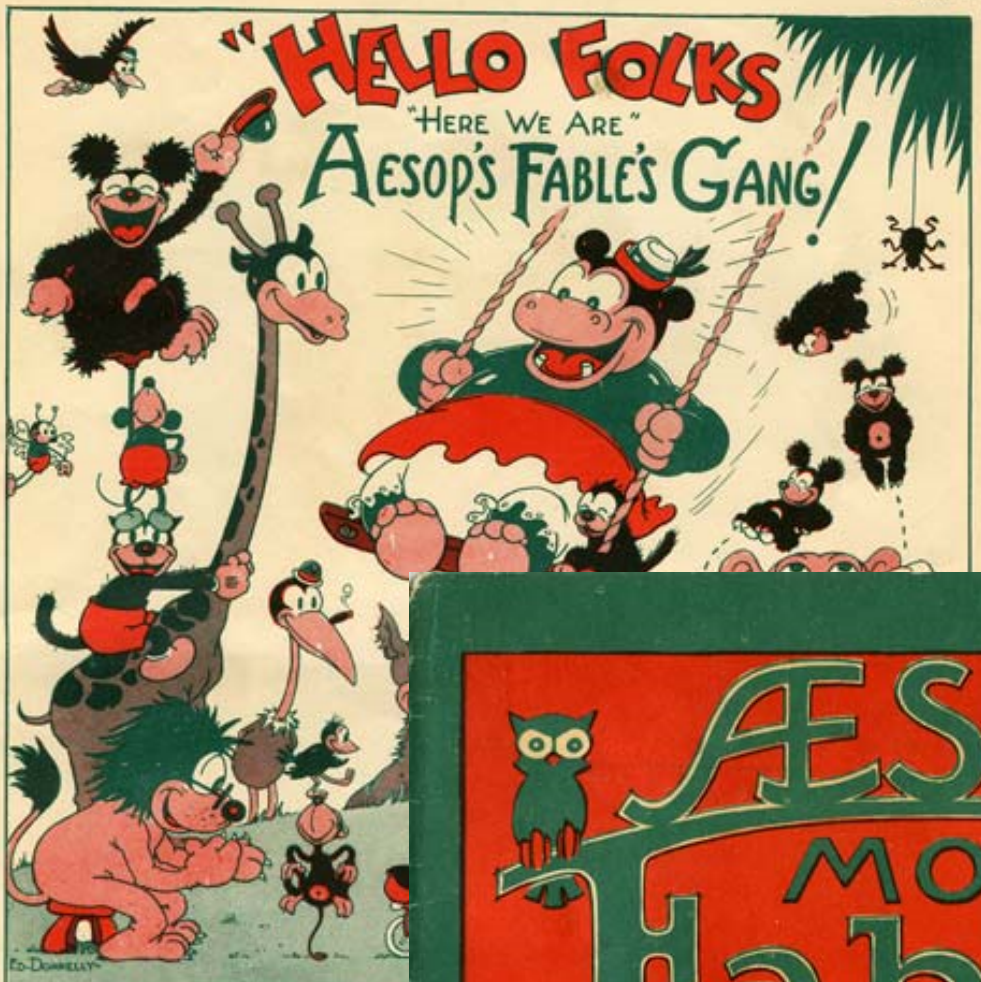
In the back Is a hat that belonged, according to the auction papers, to either Carmen Miranda, or Hedda Hopper. The document is up there with it, but I'm not about to go to the trouble to retrieve it. Anyway, it is supposed to have been made for her by Charlotte Clark. Patterns, by her, to sew that very doll and his two companions, Panchito and Donald, were later released by "Simplicity". In the two front corners, are a pair of windup toys from France, generated by Saludos Amigos, of just Donald Duck and Jose Carioca. Panchito didn't exist yet. And in the middle, are all Three Caballeros in the form of dolls made in Mexico that, at least, here, north of the border, are extremely rare.

Over the years, I did discover one item, related to The Three Caballeros that is visually exciting. This cinema toy was made in Barcelona Spain. It attempts to recreate the entire movie in 6 views, displayed in a small window, by means of a rotating wheel. The art is interesting. It has a fluid lyric quality, a unifying sensuality that permiates the entire object, and subtly sets the scene in motion.

“Paul Terry's "Aesop’s Movie Fables” are a curious mystery. This photograph I acquired, early on, captured my attention, and became a kind of challenge. The dolls pictured in it, fascinated me. Who were these unknown, but beautifully constructed characters? Could I get any? Could I get them all? Well, almost! Why do I find these a mystery. Maybe because I didn’t research them carefully, but I tend to let things explain themselves, over time. Bottom line, these characters, seemingly, personify a kind of exquisite mediocrity. They are like a generic brand of Comic Character, that was always “out there”, but never rose to recognition.

Clearly, they were on the scene, long before Mickey. And at the very point when Mickey was just being discovered, this ever changing menagerie of countless characters, had all of the same dreams. But there were next to no products made. I have a book of Hankies, currently misplaced, and this book that exactly parallels the very first Mickey Mouse book. It has the same size and format, had the same number of pages, the same content, page by page, a song, a game, and it appeared in the same year,1930. Aesop's Movie Fables and Mickey Mouse left the sound cartoon starting gate, together, with Aesop's, originally called, "Aesop's Film Fables", in the lead, having a 10 years edge, beginning on the silent screen.

Mickey made it BIG!. While these guys just coexisted, yet there were hundreds of cartoons that bore their name. Did I say bore? If you ever saw one of their cartoons, you'd understand what that word really means! And their names are sort of hilariously understated. With the exception of one pussycat called, the "Countess" and her fellow feline, a Tom, (That's one common name they missed) called "Waffles", the rest of the characters have names that redefine ordinary. Would to believe "Don Dog," "Mike Monkey," "Max Fox," "Buddy Bear,"and talk about close, but no cigar, "Milton Mouse"?



AESOP'S SOUND FABLES CARTOONS. P

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ÆSOP'S MOVIE Fables BOOK

CARTOONS STORIES
FABLES SONG MOVIE FLIP
LAUGHS & FUN.

Printed in U. S. A.

So what interested me about these characters? Simple! This amazing series of beautiful dolls! These are of top notch Quality, every bit as nice as Steiff, and they go on and on. I've seen many more, including a rabbit that looks as much like Oswald, as Milton looks like Mickey. And I've rarely seen one, be it dog, or bear, or fox, or monkey, whose seller, or "I'd never part with this treasure" owner, wasn't convinced that it was Mickey.

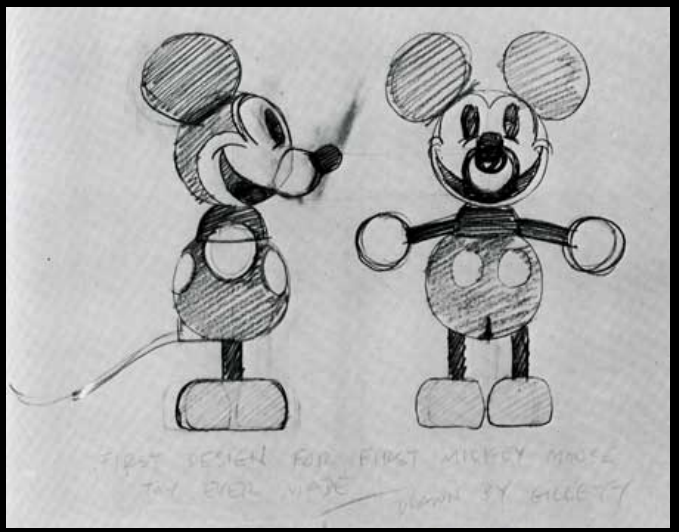
Far away, in the other upper right-hand corner of the wall, is another showcase that is somewhat overlooked, a place to squeeze in something that can't fit in elsewhere. Soon after we moved up here, I was driving down a side street in Manhattan, when, suddenly, I spotted a Big Jiggs, like this one, in the window of a dry cleaners! I slammed on the brakes, found an illegal parking place, and ran inside. Did they take me to the cleaners? No! They sold it to me, gladly, for twenty dollars. It wasn't in great shape, but I was glad to get it, the first one I'd ever seen. Years later, the one in this picture came along, complete with Maggie. I couldn't resist it! The condition was fantastic! These dolls are, most likely, from the early 1940s. That's Maggie's original jewelry, and rather dainty rolling pin.

What could be more incongruous than sharing this case with Little Nemo? Here's the very early Nemo bell toy, we've seen, before, and a large composition nodder of Flip. On the wall, is a Tuck Valentine of Little Nemo, who has had much better dreams than this.

And last of all, we come to a more exciting showcase, one that is full of many "Firsts". It contains the first Mickey Mouse toy, two of them. And my first Mickey, the cast iron Bank I found at the Paris Flea Market, in 1958, the very object that started this collection. The rest is all the early wood jointed dolls, in all their sizes and variations, as well as other early Mickey treasures, all of which are color coordinated. That color, in this case, is red.

On the far left, is a miniature papier mache display figure of Mickey, made by Old King Cole Display. On either side of the cast iron bank, are two Composition dolls by Ideal. The one on the right, was my second Mickey. This case is full of history. There is a delightful perfume atomizer in the middle. His face is metal. His body's porcelain. His ears are tin. And the back of his head is a rubber squeeze bulb that sprays the perfume out of a brass fitting, under his nose. His pose is spritely, and delightful. His arms and legs are thin and delicate. This precious trifle is a mini masterpiece of great magnificence.

Last of all, let's devote a photo to the first Mickey Mouse toy. This toy appeared in the 1930 George Borgfeldt Catalogue. It was the first, and only, Mickey Mouse to appear in their catalogue, that year. The flat version of a toy called "Micky", without an "E", by the Performo Company also appeared in the same catalogue.



Bert Gillette's original design for this first Mickey Mouse toy is pictured in the book, Disneyana, by Cecil Munsey. That volume, mostly compiled from the pages of the Kay Kamen catalogues, became the bible for early Disney Collectors.

The caption on the picture states that the toy was made in two sizes, 7 ¼" and 9 ¼". That's probably what the contract read. My guess is that it was referring to the jointed doll. The only files retained at Disney appear to have been of a business nature. If a larger figure was actually manufactured, an example of it has yet to be discovered. Apart from the fact that this was "The First Mickey Toy", it is a handsome toy, by any standard. When the tail is pressed down, the head pops up.

From here, we hop to the right, and pop in on Flip the Frog!

FLIP THE FROG

Ub Iwerks was a genius. His draftsmanship as an animator is legendary. From 1922 on, he worked with Walt Disney and remained with him, until 1930. During that time, Iwerks created “Oswald the Rabbit” and “Mickey Mouse”. From 1930 to 1937 he headed up his own studio, producing several series of animated shorts, including his own creation, “Flip The Frog”. Nonetheless, Ub Iwerk’s claim to everlasting fame will always be the fact that he created Mickey Mouse, and animated Mickeys first films, as well as the first “Silly Symphonies”, almost single-handedly. Amazingly quick and prolific, Ub was capable of turning out several hundred drawings a day. Once you see an actual animation pencil drawing by Ub Iwerks, you will recognize his style, from that time on. His lines were spontaneous, decisive, and alive.

Ub was said to have been Walt Disney’s closest friend, all through the Oswald years, and the first year of Mickey. Then there was a falling out between the two men, and Ub accepted an offer from Pat Powers to open up his own studio, under the banner of Powers's Celebrity Pictures. The films he made there, were distributed by MGM.

Iwerk’s new character was “Flip the Frog”. Flip lacked Mickey’s geometric structure as well as his charisma. He did get a little rounder and less froglike as time went on. As a collector, I Flipped, whenever any Flip related object showed up, which was not often. This page will show you most of the Flip collectibles that are generally known, and some that are not. After 40 years of hunting Flip the Frog, this is what I got. It’s, mostly, all in this one box.

The showcase is dominated by a composition figure in the centre, origin unknown. Clearly the sculptor was inspired by the bisque figure of Flip with his hands on his hips, or visa versa. Which came first, the doll or the bisque? There is also a smaller composition figure with moveable arms, There are two of those included here. This same pose was also rendered in celluloid, in two sizes. They are in the big celluloid case. And there was also a set of 3 smaller bisque musicians, playing instruments. They have become stones in the Great Pyramid of Bisques.

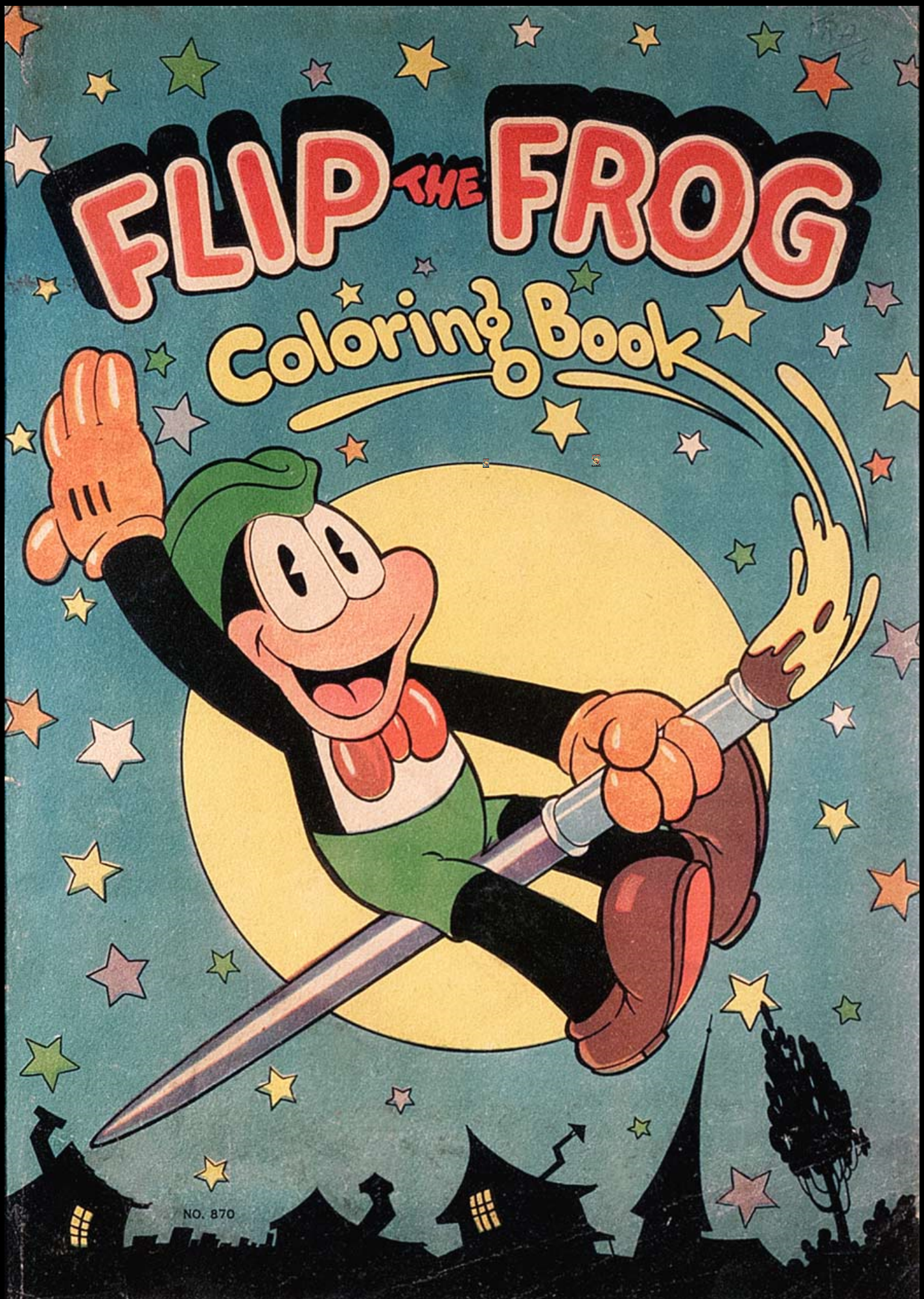
Buried in this case, as well, are four variations of a Flip doll. These dolls were produced in England in 1930 by Deans Rag Book Company, and appeared before any commercially manufactured dolls of Mickey. They came in seven sizes, the largest being 16” inches. The smallest size, which was made of velvet, is the nicest one, in my opinion. As the doll increased in size, the green velvet was replaced by green mohair, resulting in a frog as fuzzy as a teddy bear. The red faced doll came later. The logic of its color escapes me.

In the front row, starting on the left, is a tin clicker, then a set of English advertising cards that chronicle the six steps in the process of brewing a cup of "Lyon's Tea," from “hope “ to “satisfaction”. In front of that is a small German wood jointed doll that looks quite generic, perhaps not really flip. But, surprisingly, he has all the information as well and the name “Flip the Frog, deeply incised on his feet. Then, there is a porcelain napkin ring, and, at the far end, an ashtray, and finally, five tiny candle holders for use on birthday cakes.

Also hidden here is the single volume of the Flip Annual, which appeared just one year. Here too, is a set of jigsaw puzzles, and the nicest and most colorful of a never ending series of Flip ceramic planters, most of which were black and white. I’ve always liked that piece a lot, with its iridescent colors, liked it enough to have more than one, so I can include it in this group shot, without fishing its double out of the box.

Here is another Porcelain piece that couldn't fit into the case, this rather large and impressive set of porcelain bookends. These were also made in England and are early, dating from Flips froggy days.

In the back of the case, is the Flip coloring book. The cover of this is quite extraordinary. Below, is a second copy, which is actually the first edition. The later book has a row of type across the moon, suggesting that Flip is “your movie star”. That’s not the only thing that is suggestive about the cover. Was the not so subliminal symbolism of its soft core imagery created unconsciously, or was it an inside joke?


FLIP THE FROG
Coloring Book
NO. 870

Can Freudian lightning strike twice, in the same place, by accident? When we open the cover to view the title page, this is what we see. Hmmm! Whatever the intent, there is a certain consistency.

The most desirable Flip toy known is definitely the one, below, the Flip the Frog Tin Drummer. It is similar to a series of Mickey variations, but all original. Wait! On second thought I take that back. I just realized he's using Mickey's five fingered hands. Both graphically and condition wise, he is perfection. This toy was worthy of removing from its showcase to photograph on its own. When one operates a plunger on his posterior, Flip beats the drum rhythmically. I discovered this iconic object, many years ago. Neither I, nor the seller, had any idea how rare it was going to turn out to be.

The first Flip the Frog cartoon, “Fiddlesticks” was released in August 1930, when Mickey was only two years old. The short was the first sound cartoon to appear in color. It was two color Technicolor as opposed to the three color Technicolor of Disney’s “Flowers and Trees”, which appeared two years later in July of 1932. The subtle difference between two colors and three allowed Disney to claim, on a Technicolor technicality, that Flowers and Trees was the first Technicolor cartoon.

Fiddlesticks had everything going for it, everything except a story! It is just a string of tediously tepid gags set to music, and while Flip fiddles around, displaying his repetative repertoire of froggy moves, the actual “fiddle” is played by a mouse who looks suspiciously like Mickey. The audacity of this similarity is the only thing that’s funny about the cartoon.

When I was a kid, Walt Disney seemed like a god. Later, when I learned that Ub Iwerks actually created Mickey, the news was almost scandalous to me. And my esteem of Disney dropped a notch. I never zeroed in on Walt’s creative gifts, again, until years later, when I saw Flip the Frog in action. It was then that my assessment of Walt’s genius went up a lot. Whether Walt could draw or not became secondary to the fact that he really knew how to telll a story. Ub, did not!

In 1933, Iwerks signed a deal with “Cinecolor” to produce a series of “ComiColor” Cartoons. Some of these retold Fairy Tales are bizarre, and even kind of creepy. The most outrageous one in terms of concept and imagery was “Balloonland” . Over the years I have had the opportunity to purchase several ComiColor posters. “Balloonland” was the one I chose.

CELEBRITY PRODUCTIONS, INC., Presents a
P. A. POWERS
COMICOLOR
Cartoon
BALLOONLAND
By
UB IWERKS
IN Cinecolor

The film is both amazing and disturbing. The concept of being a living balloon filled with air and menaced by the Pincushion man is unnerving. One prick and you will pop! And the horrifying Pincushion man has just the prick to do the job. The Imagery of the Pincushion man, himself, is the most surreal and outrageously phallic in the history of animation. The body length lethal appendage, protruding from his crotch, is kept neatly tucked in his mouth when it is not out, doing damage. This might well be the most bizarre cartoon ever created.

IN THE HALL

Beyond the Big Room, and the studio upstairs, there is one other area the collection has invaded, and that is "The Hall." We have, already, nibbled at many of the treats, there, as they overlap other categories, to which they are more intrinsic. But there remains a lot of things that might escape, unseen, if they were not included here. Walking past all these showcases, many times, each day, tends to make them disappear. But, when one actually focuses in on them, it is surprising how much is really there.

As this is a Guided Tour, let's begin on the front porch, and walk through the two massive wooden doors that lead you to Mouse Heaven. Pearly Gates, they aint! On the brick wall, overwhelming in its size and presence, is a Giant Mickey Target. I always loved the graphics of this object, from the first time that I saw the original 18" inch version, by Marx Bros. of Boston, half a Century ago. I've seen, and had, many of them, since then. Nonetheless, the image has never lost its power for me. Many years ago, John Fawcett painted a four foot version of it, on homosote board. He added a small Mickey and Minnie on the bottom, and called it "his art." Then he used it to play darts! Eventually, it was torn to ribbons. And John was going to throw it out! But, after a bout of begging, he gave it to me, instead. And so, it hung, here, on this wall, for years, until it literally fell apart. I replaced it with this one, as big as two 4'X8' sheets of plywood, seamlessly joined together, would permit, and replicated the original toy, exactly, right down to the copyright notice, adding nothing extra. I'm not an artist. I'm a purist, who just wanted a big target!

The lower entrance area is my wife's domain. It is a jungle, and a jumble, of artificial plants, potted palm trees, brooms, snow shovels, birdseed, cat food for the outdoor cats, artificial poinsettias, illuminated jack-o-lanterns, Christmas wreaths, and a stuffed chicken, all of which sit there, all year, blocking the once wide stairs. This unheavenly vision is permeated by the sight and scent of kitty litter. It is Purgatory, a little taste of Hades that one must circumnavigate, in order to ascend into Mouse Heaven. And looking up the stairs, this is what you see, from there:

The hall is dominated by one huge showcase. Its main component measures as big as a single sheet of 4'X8' Plexiglas will allow. It is packed with mainly Mickey Mouse? Because the Plexiglas is so difficult for, even, two men to remove, very little inside it has changed, since it was photographed for "Antique Toy World," in 1995. I would love to use that same photo again! I'll look and see how sharp it is.

Well, It's not as good as I would like. It was shot on film, and this is from a print that shows its age. I'll take some new photos, today. My God! It is Amazing, almost scary, the way time has tended to stand still, here! The photo, above, was taken on a sunny day. The one, below, was shot, late, on this cloudy afternoon, just as the blue-green twilight was beginning to fade. Apart from that, the lights still shine, as bright, today, as they did then.

The one thing that has changed, is yours truly. These days, I tend to look at things from a lower angle. My respect for the things that I collect has only grown, over the years, and low angle photography, I feel, conveys a sense of their monumental awesomeness. As I've lived to appreciate and see their rarity, I am increasingly humbled by their beauty. Besides, I couldn't decide, which of these two shots I liked best! The first shows more; the second shows less, but makes less look more dramatic. Which point of view do you prefer?

Here is the central case. The two large Old king Cole displays of Mickey and Minnie were, actually, made in England. I don't know how the makers were connected. They used all of old king Cole's designs and molds, but manufactured them, over there. The central target is the original version of the big one, on the wall of the lower hall; and the mouse, standing before it, is, possibly, by Charlotte Clark. There are many Marx Bros. items in the case, both variations of the Bagatelle Game, and both the English, and American Scatter Ball Games. In the center, is the rare Marx Bros. Ring Toss Game.

The two largest Knickerbocker dolls are here, as well as two very early Borgfeldt flannel dolls. One of these is taller than the other, the only one ever found in this tall size. He's holding an Atlantic City sand pail. And the biggest, best sand pail, ever, featuring Mickey and Minnie on the Boardwalk at Atlantic City is on the far right. On the far left, is a snow shovel, with scarves flying, that is composed with the dynamics of a painting. One can also find the mickey and Minnie Paper Dolls. They are exquisitely designed. Here, too, is the fabulous Easter Mickey I found on my best day of Brimfield. This is a large doll, that, here, looks small! It's hard to visualize how big this showcase really is! Front and center is the Mickey Mouse Tumbling Circus Pull Toy with beautifully lithographed tin platform. And, just above it, is a wooden Jumping Jack that is one of the very first Mickey toys.

From here, let's go down to the Showcase, just below it. There are some very choice dolls, in this case. Starting on the left, is one of the first dolls by Borgfeldt. This is from 1931. Then, back a bit, is a long legged doll from Deans. Next, is the rare Knickerbocker Mickey Mouse Clown Doll, and two Knickerbocker Cowboy dolls, in both sizes. They are all original, with everything, including hats, guns, and lassos. Then, there is a strange orange doll from Spain. In the back, is the Chad Valley Helter Skelter Game. And right up front, is the nicest of the German Gobel figurines, Elmer Elephant, kissing Tillie Tiger.

To the left of this showcase, is another, dedicated to "Gulliver's Travels." This movie came at a time when it looked like Fleischer might rival Disney for feature length cartoons. I remember the paper dolls, on the back wall. In this era of the Modern toy industry, one can't conceive of how small the toy business was, back then. Paper dolls and paper toys were very important. Paper dolls, in particular, played the role, now filled by Barbie and her kin. And, in the center, is the rare Gulliver Doll, who, was, actually, Dianna Durbin, dressed as a man. Here, too, are two more excellent examples of the work of Joseph Kallus, in the form of wood and composition jointed dolls of "Gabby" and "King Little."

The other compartments in this large showcase have been, or will be, visited, elsewhere, Popeye, Felix and Buck Rogers. There is only one other, that we should mention here. High up, in the top right corner, with a background, consisting of the Marx Bros. Coming Home Game, is a delicious pair of Steiff Mickey and Minnie dolls. It is rare to find a Steiff Mickey with an open mouth. This is a feature usually found only on Minnie.

On the right side of this big showcase, is the Horace and Clarabelle bookcase. It is stacked with many Disney Books, of the1930s era. Books are not ordinarily my thing, but I really needed these to adapt the art for the many Mickey Mouse Colorforms I made. And, along the way, I got some beauties. My original obsession "The Art of Walt Disney," a 1942 volume that launched me on the road to becoming an artist, in the first place, is here, with all the rest, now, in good company.

To the left of the main showcase, is a free standing unit that we have glimpsed before. This features a sculpture of KoKo the clown by John Fawcett, on the top. It will be seen better, later, on John's own page. Below that, is the spectacular Barney Google Drum, with the Schoenhut Barney and Spark Plug dolls, standing atop it, and four more Schoenhut dolls, surrounding it: Jiggs, Maggie, Happy Hooligan, and a later variation of Barney. This one has a fully sculpted head. I don't know how to make a subject like this exciting, shot against an accordion door, so I pulled the door aside, to reveal a glimpse the room, behind.

PLUG
GOES
SPARK
PLUG

This showcase is one that I got from the Bambergers show. It was made to display the (then) three Mickey Mouse Marionettes. This is a classic case of be careful what you ask for, you might get it, and I did. The stuff on the bottom is impossible to access. I don't remember how I got them down there; with a stick and a hook, I guess. It's like putting a ship in a bottle. Then the stuff that's hanging has to be adjusted from above, by bending wires, after the grill is put in place.

By the stuff hanging, I mean, of course, my beautiful Polichinelle, who I got in Paris, fifty-five years ago. He has been hanging in this case for forty of those years. He is well over a hundred years old. The Crandall acrobats, in the back, fell over twice. I fixed them, the first time. It took all day. They fell again, ten years ago, and there, they stay!

On the bottom is the lovely doll that Eunice and I found, together, at the Paris Flea Market, and the Charlie McCarthy Doll that she gave me for some holiday, when we were newly wed. There is a fabulous wind up toy in the case, based on an actual circus act, from the Turn of the previous Century. An acrobat, inside a ball, maneuvers it to the top of a winding spiral, and when it reaches the pinnacle, the ball opens up, and out he pops!

Here, also, is a dramatic Ring Toss Game. The clown's grinning face resembles the famous grin of Coney Island's Steeplechase Park. And here is a colorful toy theater that, even though, it was made in England, represents the New York Hippodrome.

The florescent light bulb, by the way, has never needed to be changed, ever since it was placed there in 1973. The light stays on, night and day.

Now, let's head down the hall that leads past the kitchen. Along the wall, on the left, are a few of Charles Ponstingls' Carvings. There are many more, elsewhere. At the end of the hall, is the showcase with the Mickey Mouse Circus Train, atop it stands a set of Snow White figurines that we will see better, later. On the wall is the Clock I "made" in New York City. As these photos are all time exposures, the mouse, which rotates, will always be out of focus. One can't turn on the neon lights, alone.

With just the clock alight, the hall is filled with fuchsia light.

ELECTRIC

LIONEL
MICKEY MOUSE
ENTRANCE

And here is the Circus train, itself. At one time, before anybody knew about the sort of Mickey Mouse tin toys that were made in Europe, this was considered the Holy Grail of Mickey Mouse Collecting. It's true, the lithographed train cars are delicious, and the cardboard tent is fabulous. This was part of the exquisite batch of Mickey art that was generated in NYC. Ironically, the box, itself, is ugly. I just went to look at it, now, wondering if I should include it here. Nah! One glance, and I remembered why I always keep it out of sight.

Now back into the hall again. Another showcase that is difficult to photograph is this one. It includes, two big minty delicious Mickey and Minnie dolls, the largest size Steiff made. Minnie has her tags, labels, and everything.

That is everything in the Hall that we have not seen, yet, or will see, later, elsewhere. Gus Whites Punch is done, and the Blue Ribbon Waddle Book is yet to come. And, of course, Charles Ponstingl's carvings have a whole website of their own. This leaves only the posters.

So, here are the first two, "Mickey's Nightmare" and "Building a Building", along with a fabulous poster for "The Dayton Family." They were a family of acrobats. The poster reveals every trick in their entire act! Mickey's Nightmare is the Best Mickey Mouse poster EVER! The big image of Mickey is Killer! The cartoon, itself, was just OK. But nothing could equal the poster, anyway.

I traded the other poster from Disney, in exchange for a bunch of toys, dolls and figurines, as they really didn't have any in the archive, at that time. Now they have mine! All they had, then, was a pitiful showcase full of stuff, shown in color in the Munsey book. I was offered a list of Mickey cartoons to choose from, in exchange, and instructed to pick one, from column A, and two, from column B. While this trade was taking place, I was literally "Building a Building, and doing it all by myself. Or I might better say, tearing one down! And the very spot where we are standing, now, and the corner we are looking at, above, looked like this!

On the other wall, is another pair of posters, the two I chose from column B. Mickey was on the A list. The Silly Symphonies were on the B. This pair, which are, ironically, more rare, are the same coupling that were grouped, together, in the Blue Ribbon "Silly Symphonies Pop Up Book."

Years later, when I saw the actual cartoons, I was shocked! King Neptune might be one of the most disturbing cartoons ever made. It's all about attempted rape, punished by death. King Neptune, a fat naked old man, sings a ditty reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan, then laughs sadistically, as he drowns a shipload of lecherous drunken sailors and stomps on their ship. Afterwards, he sits on the sunken wreckage and sings his merry song again. I guess this was considered appropriate for kids, in the days of Big Bad Wolves and Bogymen.

Oh, I just realized that there is one poster that was hiding behind the walking Mickey Carousel Figure, when seen, from the bottom of the stairs. I guess, to make this page complete, I should include it here. Therefore, I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to get a decent photo of "Touchdown Mickey".

Talk about unexpected, I not only didn't anticipate this, but the shot was set up by Fate, entirely! There was only one camera angle from which the Plexiglas was not bathed in reflections from lights and windows. So, when I found that only angle, the rest was there, already. Thus, Mickey set the shot up for me. All I had to do was avoid reflections and click the shutter. As Mickey posters go, Touchdown Mickey is one of the more dynamic ones. And it also happens to be a genuinely great cartoon!

ADVERTISING ICONS

The World of Advertising has generated its own iconography of familiar visual images, Idols, every bit as powerful as the most popular of Comic Characters. They range from the earliest examples, such as the "RCA Nipper Dog", and "Bibendum, the Michelin Tire Man," who will have a whole page of his own, to "Mr. Peanut," "Ready Kilowatt," and "Elsie the Borden Cow." Their tradition continues, right up to the present day, represented, now, by those sometimes vilified purveyors of fast food, "Ronald McDonald" and the "Burger King". Those last two, as well as the "Geico Gecko," are too late to be included here, but all the rest, have found a place in Mouse Heaven.

Many of those idols, small enough to fit, are represented in the showcase, below, which is located on the Great Wall, just above the Pyramid of Bisques. Other larger objects are scattered, throughout the house.

Right in the middle we find Bonzo in his official capacity as the "Crosley Pup". This was Crosley's answer to RCA Victor's "Nipper" and His Master's Voice! This is the advertising version of an image that also existed, without earphones, as just plain Bonzo. There is a smaller version of the Pup in plaster, to the left, with advertising on his chest.

Behind Bonzo, are three dolls designed by Maxfield Parrish, and manufactured by Joseph Kallus. They represent both color variations of the RCA Radiotron Man, who wears a hat that represents a vacuum tube. Note the slots in their hands. They were designed to hold advertising cards. The larger doll is the GE Radio man, he is a kind of Drum Major, complete with a baton. On either end, are two Hot Point Men, also by Kallus. It is interesting that these advertising dolls, not intended to be sold to the public, have survived. Maybe that's why. In the front, on the right, is the National Bisquit Company's "Zu Zu", the Ginger Snap Clown. This doll was manufactured in two sizes, and was intended to be sold as a toy.

Right behind Zu Zu, is the Dunlop Golf Ball Man. This popular image was designed by John Hassall for the Dunlop Tire Company. They also made golf balls. And this image appeared on all sorts of objects. Here are two of the more elegant manifestations of it, a German Bisque, by Schaffer Vater and a pot metal paper weight, on a marble base. The heads are pose-able on both the figures.

Here, too, is the “Kool Penguin.” And in front of him, a most curious toy, “SUSH! The Radio Bug". He came in many pieces that joined together to construct the figure. Listening with earphones, he represents a moment in the progress of technology that was soon over.

Scattered around the case, are several images of Mr. Peanut. The nicest is the elegant, and highly detailed cast metal statue, to the right of Bonzo. On the left, is the Wood Jointed Mr. Peanut doll. Then, there is the painted version of the plastic bank. And, on the far right, is a paper mache container, with the fragile paper label on his hat; and farther right, beyond that, is the plastic Windup toy. I nearly passed by a rubber image, to the left of Zu Zu, that, so far, has survived.

Elsewhere in the house, apart from the Mr. Peanut Costume, which has cropped up in many photos already, are two more rather nice Mr. Peanut objects. The first, I have had for 45 years. He is the figure that is intended to be riding on the barrel of a peanut roaster. At the time I got him, in NYC, there were rumors that the roaster he belonged on was going to show up, any day. It always eluded me, So here he stands/sits, waiting.

The other image is my favorite. This object fascinated me, ever since I saw one, tapping on a window in Times Square, when I was a kid. This one is set up to tap on his Plexiglas showcase. That was a bad idea. After a few minutes, it becomes annoying. At his feet are two dolls of the Campbell Kids by Grace Drayton, in amazing condition. And at their feet is a series of tiny chefs that resemble those in Sendak's "Night Kitchen."

MR.PEA
Campbell's KID
A HORSMAN DOLL
SOUP
Campbell's KID
A HORSMAN DOLL
SOUP
PLANT
MR.PE

A few Advertising oddities remain. Although, the category was not my thing, many characters and objects transcended that lack of enthusiasm, and moved in. I must confess that I have a thing for these really early dolls of the Spearmint Kid. There's one in the case above, and two elsewhere. Here is the ad in Playthings magazine that announced them, in 1915.

TOYS
AMERICAN B&B NOVELTIES
BAKER & BENNETT CO. NEW YORK

THE SPEARMINT KID

WITH THE WRIGLEY EYES
Something New to Chew On

The Best Advertised Doll on Earth. You see him in the Subway, Elevated Trains and Street Cars, the country over.

THE NEWEST HIT IN CHARACTER DOLLS

Grotesque — Animated — Has a Voice — It is Different.
Retails for 50 cts. Send in Your Orders.

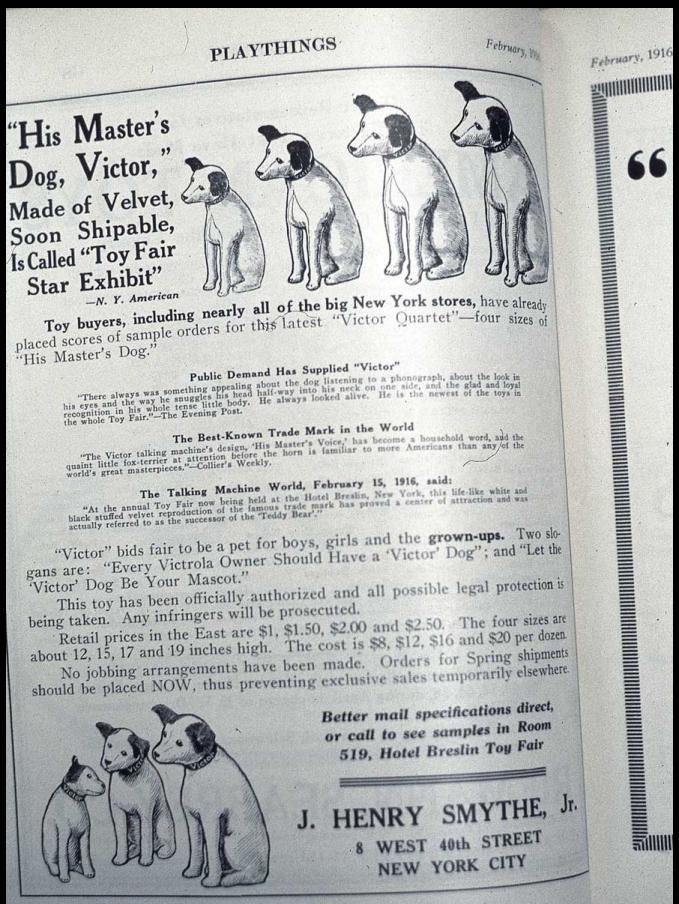
BAKER & BENNETT COMPANY

643 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

And here are two examples, one with the original spear. They fold up like an accordion, and, at one time, squeaked. They have a spring inside to make them pop up again. And, according to the ad, they have "Wrigley Eyes!" One has the original hang-tag. The other carries a pole with the remnants of what was, apparently, some sort of flag. Both have staffs with lethal points. The Kid on the left has a pull string with a celluloid ring that makes him do his thing. Their faces, too, are celluloid. The color green has faded, long ago, from every one of these that I have ever seen, which in total, is three, all of which are here with me.

And here is a display piece that I really have no place to display, but I love it anyway. It is big, a full four feet wide, and beautiful. The images are alive and powerful! It now resides in a darkened stairway. At least, it won't fade there.

Here is an oddity I'm pretty sure is rare. This is the original ad, as it appeared in Playthihgs Magazine in 1916, "His Masters Voice Dog, Victor". The ad sure goes into a lot of details, complete with testimonials. But, in spite of all its excess explanations, it still isn't clear if this doll was licensed from RCA Victor, or not.



PLAYTHINGS February, 1916

"His Master's Dog, Victor," Made of Velvet, Soon Shipable, Is Called "Toy Fair Star Exhibit"
—N. Y. American

Toy buyers, including nearly all of the big New York stores, have already placed scores of sample orders for this latest "Victor Quartet"—four sizes of "His Master's Dog."

Public Demand Has Supplied "Victor"

"There always was something appealing about the dog listening to a phonograph, about the look in his eyes and the way he snuggles his head half-way into his neck on one side, and the glad and loyal recognition in his whole tense little body. He always looked alive. He is the newest of the toys in the whole Toy Fair."—The Evening Post.

The Best-Known Trade Mark in the World

"The Victor talking machine's design, 'His Master's Voice,' has become a household word, and the quaint little fox-terrier at attention before the horn is familiar to more Americans than any of the world's great masterpieces."—Collier's Weekly.

The Talking Machine World, February 15, 1916, said:

"At the annual Toy Fair now being held at the Hotel Breslin, New York, this life-like white and black stuffed velvet reproduction of the famous trade mark has proved a center of attraction and was actually referred to as the successor of the 'Teddy Bear.'"

"Victor" bids fair to be a pet for boys, girls and the **grown-ups.** Two slogans are: "Every Victrola Owner Should Have a 'Victor' Dog"; and "Let the 'Victor' Dog Be Your Mascot."

This toy has been officially authorized and all possible legal protection is being taken. Any infringers will be prosecuted.

Retail prices in the East are $1, $1.50, $2.00 and $2.50. The four sizes are about 12, 15, 17 and 19 inches high. The cost is $8, $12, $16 and $20 per dozen.

No jobbing arrangements have been made. Orders for Spring shipments should be placed NOW, thus preventing exclusive sales temporarily elsewhere.

Better mail specifications direct, or call to see samples in Room 519, Hotel Breslin Toy Fair

J. HENRY SMYTHE, Jr.
8 WEST 40th STREET
NEW YORK CITY

"Victor" came in four sizes, of which this is the largest.

He sits beside the stereo, a link between the first talking machine and my own monument to 1950s technology. This equipment , especially the huge speakers, downstairs, are 45 years old. They still sound great, today. Oh, here, also, is a Joseph Kallus' doll called, Joy, in her original box. She is a joy to see. Here too is a small stray, who looks a lot like “Victor's” pup to me. And a rarity that I advertised for for years, and never saw, except this one, "The Baseball Doll."

Next is Reddy Kilowatt. I could kill for some of these. This is the small accumulation or Reddys that came my way, over the years. Some were exciting, even, Electrifying, and some were just OK. In the back, is a huge wood jointed display. This has been “electrified” with a light bulb for a nose. I wonder how he’ll look with one of those newfangled spirals?

Among this group of Reddy knickknacks, is a pair that is quite rare. One is made of wood and painted gold. The other is similar to the later ones, but his image is much earlier. The later Reddy figures, too, are really quite wonderful. The bases that they literally plug into, being light sockets, is a touch of genius. Their bodies are crystal clear Lucite. The earlier one is infused with Day-Glo. And few people realize, perhaps because its strength fades, over time, that the white elements of these figures, actually, glow in the dark, with a ghostly pale blue light. Towering above them, is an elegant Reddy trophy, standing on a milk glass pedestal. It depicts Reddy, triumphantly harnessing a fistful of lightening bolts, like the Mighty Norse God Thor.

This marionette is unique. He is obviously one of a kind, and absolutely fabulous! His nose, too, is wired for electricity. A battery pack is incorporated into his controller that makes his nose light up. The power travels down those two fat red "strings." I am still looking for one of those big red light bulbs to replace the one that's there, the kind that they used to use on the transformers of Lionel trains.

One of the most impressive Reddys would be the huge stuffed “doll” by Lars of Italy. It seems that I was not the only one who special ordered things from them. This doll is enormous! And his nose, too, is wired to light up. If you saw the electric cord, then you, like me, would be afraid to plug him in.

Reddy Kilowatt was unusual in that there was no overriding dictatorial committee to decide what branch offices could create. Different electric companies, in different states, were allowed make any kind of images they pleased. In that respect, Reddy never becomes boring to collect. There is no predicting what one will see next.

One more object that falls into the category of “Readymade”, as an extraordinary Work of Art, ready to go, is this gratifying object that depicts a “Mongol” pencil. This advertising symbol is intriguing. I first encountered it in the form of this simple cardboard fold out. The repeated image is eye-catching. But fully realized in 3 Dimensions, the effect is dramatic.

This perfect rendition, in wood, turned up at Atlantic City. Clearly, it is the same image, although, the name has been changed to "Van Dyke". I just looked it up on Google: “Eberhard Faber’s Mongol pencil was originally the company’s high grade drawing pencil. It must not have achieved the expected success because sometime between 1914 and 1920 the Van Dyke drawing pencil succeeded it.” That would appear to date the Cardboard fold out as very early. This sculpture is simple but impressive. It is larger than shown here. And, in person, it has an amazing presence.

Pushing the confines of this category, here is something difficult to classify, but if it does not go here, then where? This is a visual Bacchanal, for anyone who loves rich complex imagery, particularly that which relates to Side Shows, Fairs and Carnivals. This is Guaranteed to send your imagination "RUNNIN WILD!" This amazing artifact was, either in a time capsule, or, in fact, is one, in itself! Now, travel to the Turn of the Century to take a chance on the ultimate Prize Giveaway. My God ! This thing is Great! Once you enter into it, you will get lost in the crowd.

The array of merchandise, if accurately portrayed, would permit one to date this artifact. Some of those prizes, the toys, especially, would be worth a lot more than the nickel fee, today. Far more fascinating are the crowd, and the Side Show Attractions. If you get close enough, the imagery will draw you into the world that it portrays. In the sky is every kind of current airship of the day, two dirigibles and a parachute, no planes. One concessionaire appears to be holding a Kewpie doll. If that is the case, it would date this from after 1913.

This stand-up display is, in itself, an impressive and complex piece of paper engineering. A full four feet wide, it all folds up. Each corner, where the folds meet, has a tiny hole to relieve stress. The Barkers head is a separate piece that fits into an envelope, affixed to the back, and then rests in a pocket, fashioned in his collar, to hold his neck.

I guess, that pretty much covers the small selection of advertising, with the exception of Bibendum, who we will meet, eventually

BIL BAIRD

Bil Baird was like a god to me, albeit a minor deity, who took a back seat to the all-powerful omnipotent Walt Disney. I first encountered him in the Hampton School auditorium, when I was in the 5th grade. And my world, since then, was never quite the same. Making puppets, or, at least, attempting to, beginning many, completing few, became my thing. That was, of course, just one of the many pastimes I found to fill my time, which included everything, from creating aliens, with rolling tennis balls for eyes, to tying fishing flies. Not to mention, constructing Rube Goldberg like mousetraps, designed to bring 'em back alive.

I'll never forget the day Bil Baird entered my life. I was ten, at the time. At Hampton Elementary school we occasionally saw movies. These were usually educational films. Some, to my delight, were produced by Disney. There was even one, in which The Seven Dwarfs fought malaria mosquitoes. These showings would take place, in shifts, in the auditorium, usually on Fridays. By the end of the day, the entire school would have seen the movies.

One Friday, there was a double bill, two films by Bil Baird! They were made for the telephone company to teach good manners when using a party line. The first was called "Party Lines," and the second "Adventures in Telezonia."

These films opened my eyes! The marionettes were beautifully made. Their faces were so artfully animated that they, actually, seemed to change expression. And the puppets moved in a unique and agile way, as if they were weightless, and alive. I was mesmerized. So much so, that when the classes changed, I did a brave and brazen thing. On sudden impulse, as my class filed out of the auditorium, I felt compelled to stay behind and hide between the rows of seats. Then, I popped up again, and took a seat, as the next group filed in. I saw the films three times, that day. Nobody in my class, missed me.

After that, at home and camp, I often attempted to make puppets. Later, Bill and Cora Baird and their marionettes appeared regularly on TV. There was a show called "Life with Snarky Parker." I loved the puppet's abstract styling. They had a look that was unique, and as distinctive as Disney, but different. And, technically, they were amazing. The shows were often slow and corny, and, in spite of my fascination with the puppets, excruciatingly boring. But I endured these shortcomings, gladly, to gaze in admiration at the exquisitely made puppets. Bil Baird's marionettes made Howdy Doody look like Doody!

In the early days of television Bil Baird was omnipresent, I saw him nearly every day, enduring Life with Snarky Parker, just to see the puppets. Later on, his pint-sized actors appeared in "specials", like Peter and The Wolf, starring Art Carney, and they even made some TV ads. One series of these, featured Elsie the Borden Cow. She, along with Elmer, who ended up as glue, and their young calf, Beauregard are hanging around, behind me, now!

These frequent appearances made Bil Baird far more tangible than the elusive, exclusive, Disney, who, in those early days of TV, appeared in only one special, every year. I find it quite surprising, how many people who visit Mouse Heaven, profess to never having seen a Bil Baird Puppet, or recognize his name. Then, I mention that his puppets were in "The Sound of Music," and they say, Oh Yeah! The reason his name comes up is, simply, because nobody enters here, without being drawn to "Bubbles La Rue."

It's not like Bil Baird is a category of collectibles. In his lifetime, there was little generated, by way of Bil Baird merchandise. Essentially, there was one rubber like puppet of his signature lion, Charlemagne. I played with mine incessantly. One time, my friend, Bucky, and I took turns operating him, as he dramatically lip-synced an entire two hour recording of Aida. The same toy, without his mane, became a regular, "Pookie," on the Soupy Sales Show. But, apart from that, there was nothing to collect. Until, that is, after Bil's death, when miraculously, the lion's share of his puppets and marionettes went up for auction, at the Greenwich Auction Room, in NYC, on September 19, the day after my birthday in 1987! Whatta day!

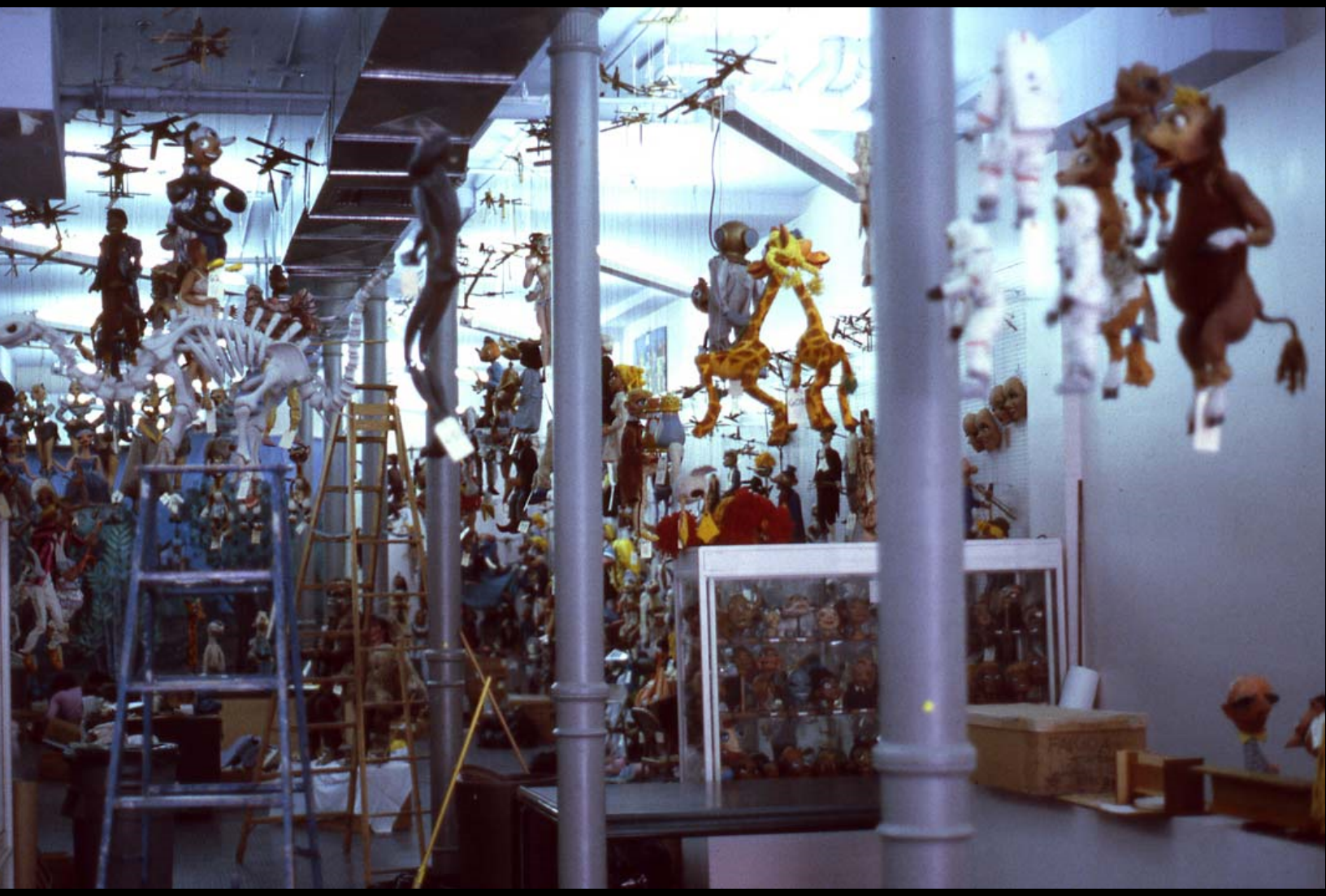
Noel Barrett, who is a Baird fan, too, and I were there. All the leading lights of puppetry were there, as well. And Puppeteers, who had spent their lives operating Bil's puppets, were on hand to put each and every puppet through its paces, one more time, as they came up for bids. It was both a joyous, and a sad occasion, as puppeteers, who had spent their lives with these puppets, knew they were pulling their strings for the last time. Some had tears in their eyes.

Alas, with each string pulled, the prices rose. And I came face to face with the reality of not having enough money. Up to this time, the things I had collected, within reason, had been within my means. I wish I had budgeted more carefully, and chose more wisely. Early in the auction, when I had no idea how high the prices were going to go, I thought I could afford to bid on these bugs, of which there are four. As the auction progressed, I might have wished that I had saved that money to bid on things I wanted more. The spider is my favorite of the four. His multiple legs are cleverly rigged to move, in unison.

I was particularly drawn to Elsie the Cow and her Family. In retrospect, I think that desire began when I was ten and saw them all, Elsie, Elmer and Beauregard, beautifully carved out of fresh creamery butter, at the Michigan State Fair. The puppets proved inordinately expensive, and put a serious dent in my resources. As bad luck would have it, I was bidding against the Borden Company. The young man sent to execute their bid was heatedly conferring with his employer on the phone. I can't believe that I outbid the Borden Company. Not having won the puppets, the Borden bidder got up and left. This made the Elsie load that followed later, a little more affordable. There were two animated busts of Elsie, used for close-ups in the ads, and a bunch of amazing extra heads.

When I was an awe struck kid, I really thought it was part Magic, and part my infatuated imagination, that made Bil's puppets seem to change expression. It wasn't until the Bil Baird auction, that I fully realized my childhood memories had been enhanced by the fact that the puppeteers were simply changing heads. So, here they are, in a dramatic display of Bil Baird's Wizardry. This showcase, in the hall, still holds much enchantment for me. It contains the disembodied extra heads of Elsie and her bovine Family, seemingly, suspended in space, against a background of deep black velvet.

The reason these photos of the auction show such disarray, is because Noel and I were there on set up day. The only way one could see some of these puppets was by climbing a ladder. There on the right, very blurry, are my cows to be. And on the left, you can make out a large spectacular Dinosaur. It was made for Baird's production of the Carnival of the Animals. Noel bought this fantastic fossil at the auction, and hung it in his in-house elevator.



Sometime later, he sold the Dinosaur to me. Now it hangs, here, in "The Mouse Heaven Museum of Natural History."

Here is one more photo of the set up, and the blurry Dinosaur is front and center. But the one object that is in focus, peering over his tail bone, is an apparition of beauty, known as, "Bubbles La Rue". She was created in 1942, when I was five years old. And she was the one Puppet in the auction that I was determined to own.

I had been infatuated with her ever since I saw her picture in Bil Baird's book "The Art of the Puppet." Of all the images in the book, that one small black and white photo spoke to me. I never dreamed that I would ever have a chance to own her. Now, here she was, in person, hanging from the rafters.

I climbed a precariously tall ladder to behold her. I did so, discreetly, hoping no one else would notice her, hanging up there, so inconspicuously. I knew, whoever beheld her, would want her too!

The bidding was Hot and Heavy. A puppeteer, who knew Bubbles well, was there to operate her. When she appeared, a gasp rose from the audience. My heart was beating wildly. Her every move was magic. I held my paddle in the air, and didn't put it down. With every string the puppeteer pulled, the bidding rose. Every little bump and grind cost me a hundred dollars. I was suffering. As fascinated as I was to see her perform, I was wishing she would stop, already! Finally, the bidding began to slow down. Bubbles was doing everything she could to keep it going. And just as the bidding came to an end, a few seconds, too late (I got her) she did her special thing!

Thank God, she waited until the bidding was over. Had she done it before, it would have cost me many dollars. So here she is, on a pedestal of her own, in a place of honor in Mouse Heaven. She's glad to be here, where it's never cold. The potbellied stove stays alight, all winter.

So what is her special trick, you might be wondering? I won't, merely, describe it; I've arranged for her to do it for you. When Bubbles did her strip tease act, many years ago, she appeared on the stage, fully, and glamorously, clothed. Piece by piece, she removed each article of clothing, slowly, with lots of exotic dancing, in between. Finally, when she had taken off everything, within the bounds of decency, she removed one final thing. Can you guess what it might be? No, it wasn't her sparkling G string. It was something else, instead. Do you give up? The answer is : her head!

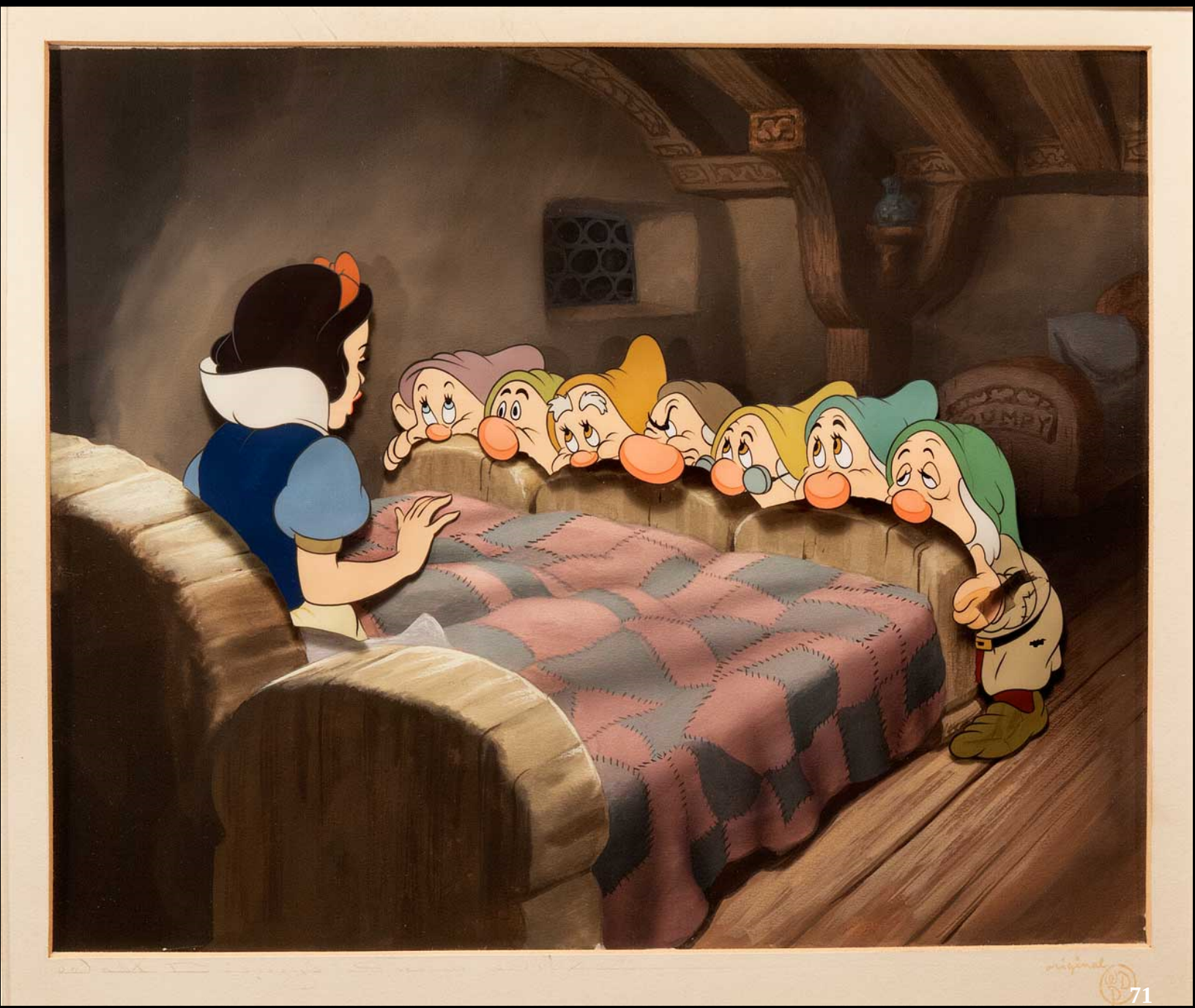
POPEYE

There is a footnote to this story. Six months after the auction ended, I got a call from Jesse Bien, the owner of The Greenwich Auction Room, who I had gotten to know. He was offering me an opportunity to own a famous puppet, one of Baird's best known, "Heathcliff", who was Snarky Parker's Horse, on "Life With Snarky Parker," as well as co-starring in many other shows. It seems the man, who won him, at the auction, had paid for him, but never came to get him. Now, Bil's son, Peter Baird, was looking to sell him. The original buyer's payment was put in escarole, in case he should return. But, in the meantime, Peter was offering him to me. Would you believe, for three times the auction price? Snarky Parker's horse! I bought him, of course!

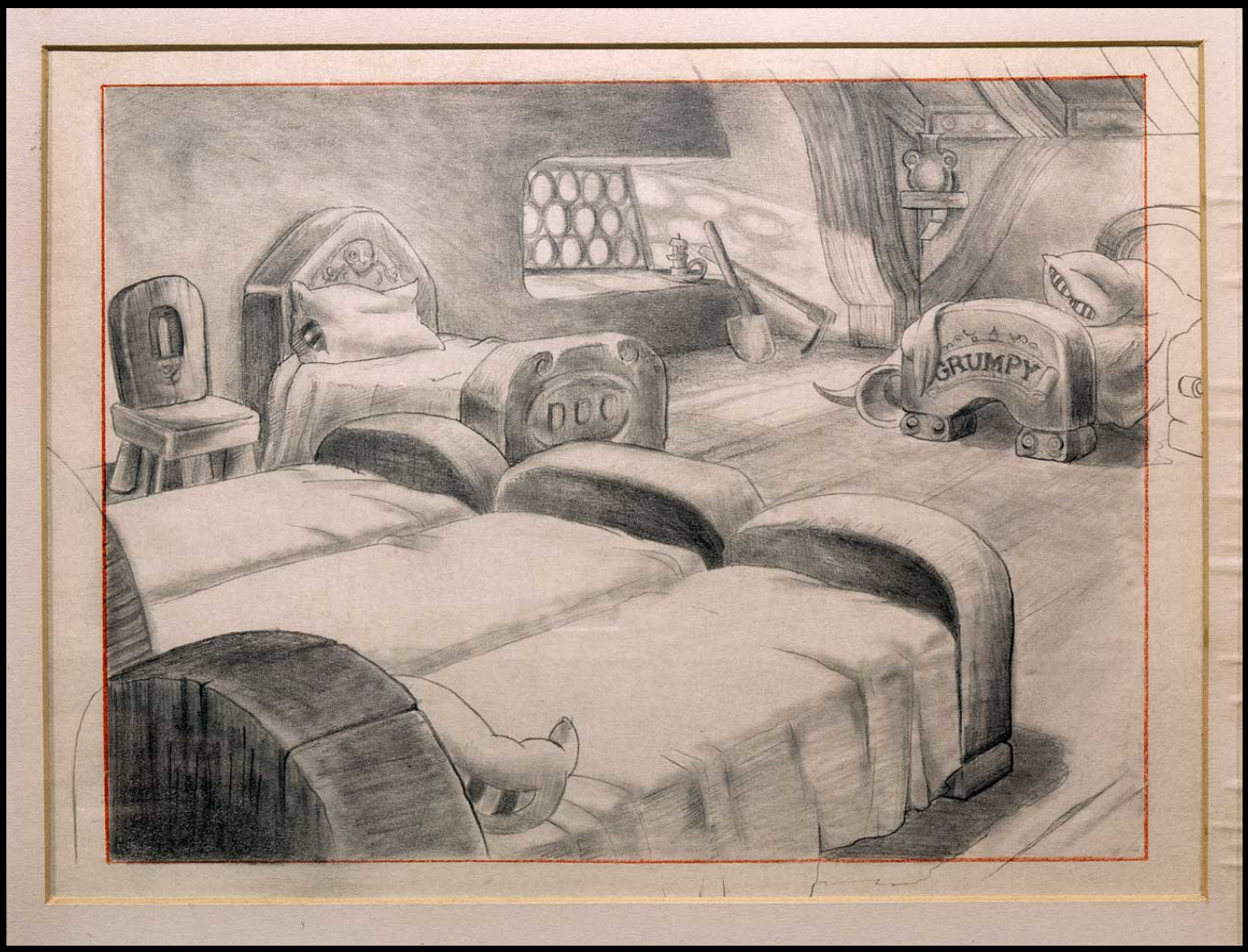
SNOW WHITE

Let's begin this page with the best Snow White item in the Collection. It might well be the best item, of any kind in the Collection. When "Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs" appeared, four days before Christmas, in 1937. The movie had an impact on the World that forever altered Motion Picture History. To this day, it is considered, by many, to be The Greatest Animated Movie of all time. And The Greatest Animated Movie, generated a single "cel" of animation that many would consider the Greatest Animation Cel of all time, as well.

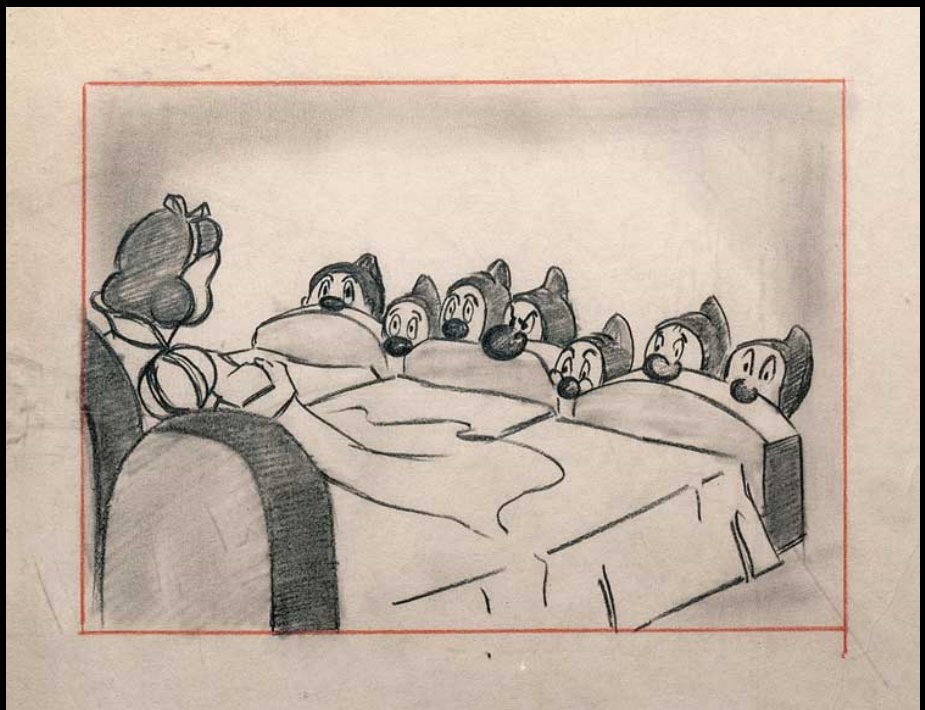
Right from the beginning, this cel came to represent the film in its entirety. For half a Century, this iconic image has been used to symbolize Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs, in Books, publicity, calendars, and anthologies, by everyone, especially, Disney! It depicts the ultimate scene, in which Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs meet, for the first time, and all Seven Dwarfs in a line, peek over the foot (or feet) of Snow White's bed, as she sits up, surprised. And by a curious twist of Destiny, this, the most famous and familiar cel, in Disney's history, found its way to me! Here it is now, the Ultimate Snow White Animation Cel, complete with its original background.



And, lest there is any doubt as to its authenticity, here, is the actual pencil drawing for the background, as well.



The group also includes this curious concept sketch that is so badly drawn, one could believe it might have been done by Disney, himself, to convey the essence of the scene. I have seen another drawing from the series, by the same hand, published by Disney. As rough as this sketch may be, we can still identify some of the key dwarfs, Dopy, Doc, and Grumpy, in the order they appear in the final cel.



This beautiful Snow White cel, begs the question, Is this the fairest cel of all? Art, directly adapted from it appeared, time and again, from the very beginning. Here it is, as it was translated into the watercolor medium, in the first edition of the official Snow White Story book, published by Grosset and Dunlap in 1937.

"You're Sneezy!" laughed Snow White, and quickly changing to a mock frown, she said, "and you're Grumpy!"

"Yeh!" said Grumpy turning his back. "We know who we are. Ask her who she is and what she's doing in our house!"

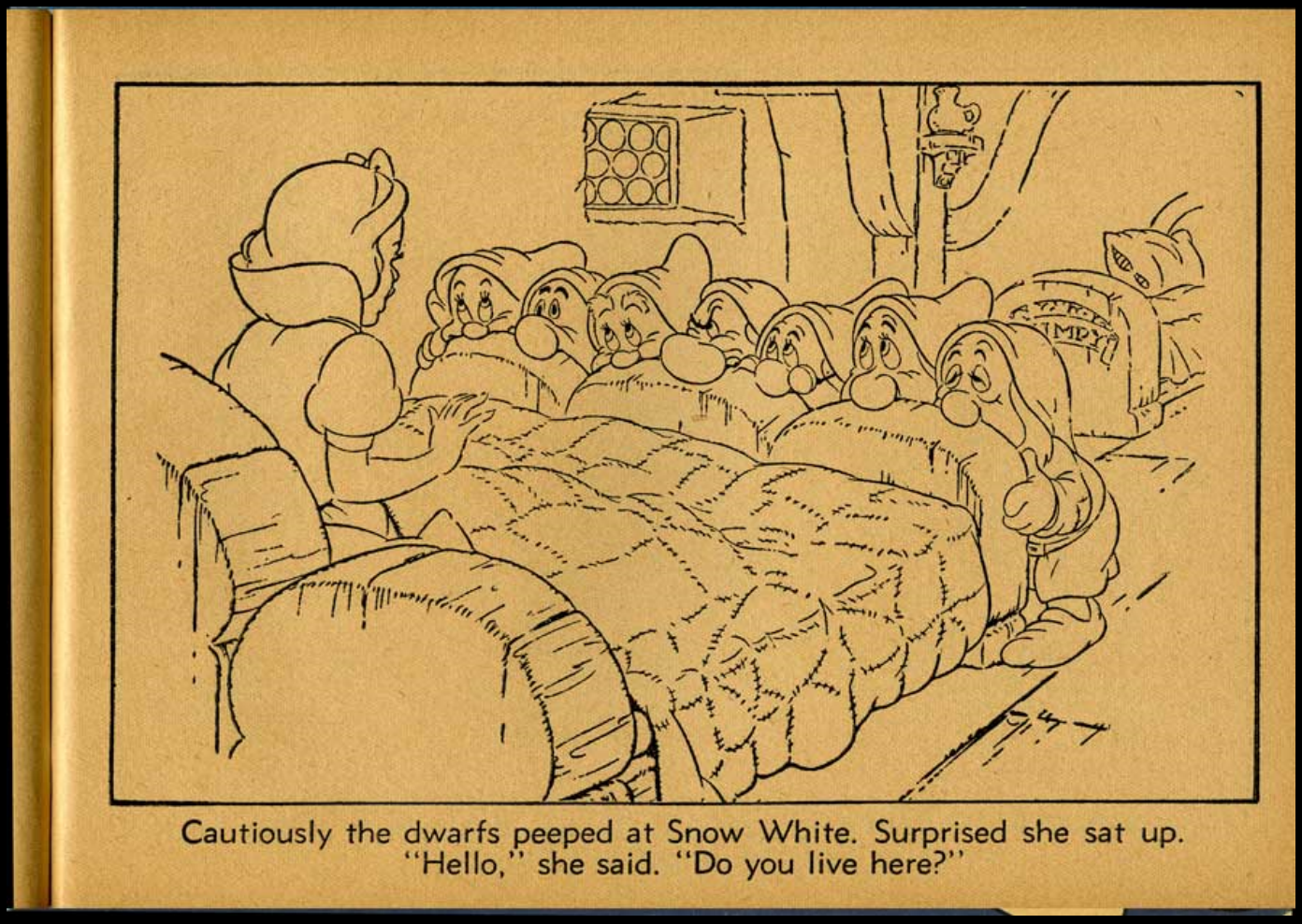
"Oh! I forgot to tell you. I'm Snow White."

"*THE PRINCESS*!" they all said together.

She nodded and started to tell them of her adventures, but when she mentioned the Queen they gasped and their eyes almost popped out of their heads.

[36]

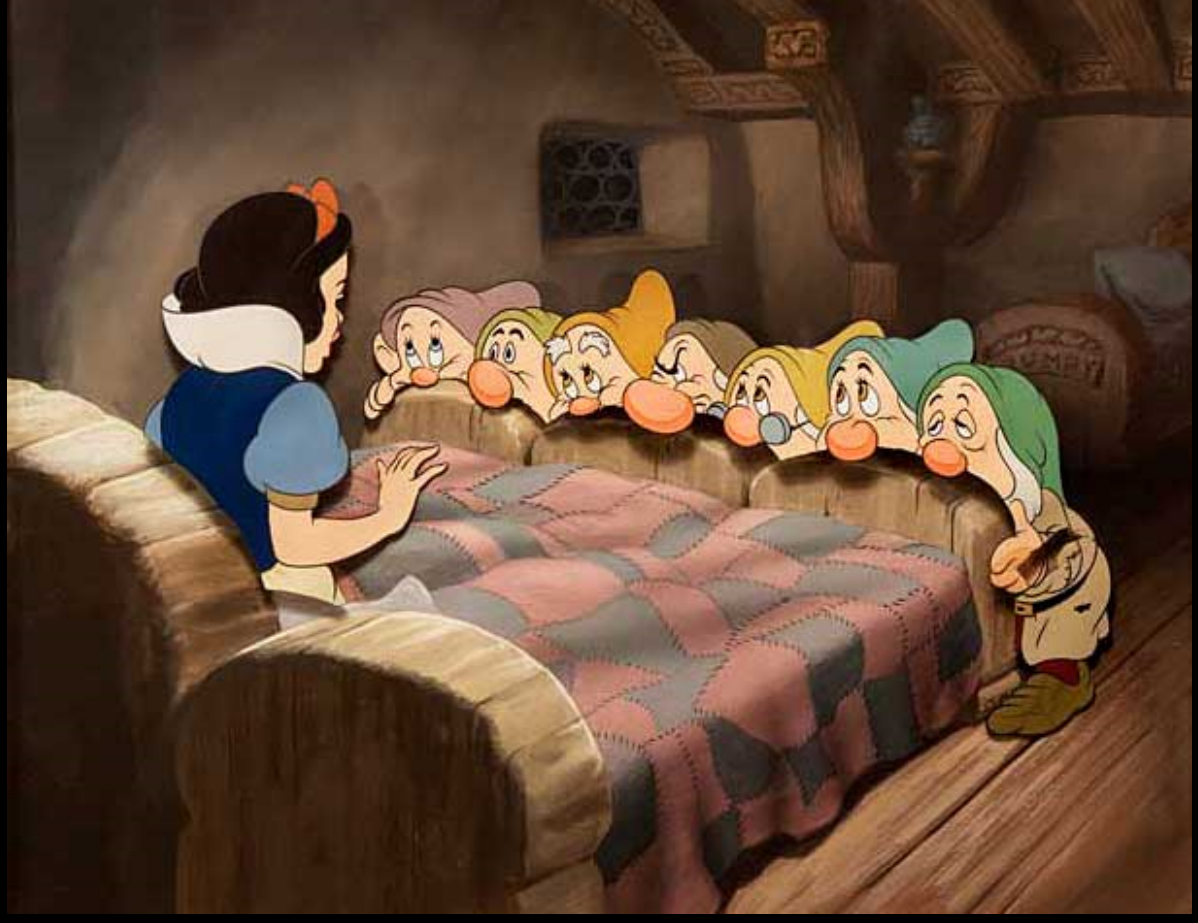
And here it is, again, as a line drawing in this coloring book from 1938.



Cautiously the dwarfs peeped at Snow White. Surprised she sat up. "Hello," she said. "Do you live here?"

It has appeared as lobby cards, and black and white glossy stills that accompanied the film, displayed in theater lobbies, again and again, every time the movie reappeared, over the years. And each time the photo was reprinted, the colors changed a little bit, while the original cel remained the same.

In recent times, this art was redrawn by Disney, in an awkward attempt to show more of Snow White's face, at the expense of making her appear to look away from, rather than directly at the dwarfs, in surprise. Her face has now been turned to the right, as if she is viewing someone entering the room, and it is newly prettified, and shrunk considerably in size. Her rouge is redder than before, and she has a look of pleasant passiveness, rather than surprise. Equally unfortunate is the fact that the beautifully modulated brush lines of the original art have been reduced to a lifeless tracing with a spidery thin and timid line. The delicate quilt has become a painting by Mondrian. You can compare the original to the newly refurbished version.



Why Fate decreed that this Treasure would end up with me, is a mystery. When I loaned Bambergers my Mickey Mouse collection for the now historic Exhibition in 1973, they accommodated my request to add this cel to the display. I found it at a small antique shop, across the river. It was called, Lola's Antiques. Lola had been given the cel to sell by a woman who had retired to this area. Her late husband had been an executive at the Disney studios in California, a lawyer, possibly. I don't recall Lola telling me he was an animator, but he might have been. This cel and its accompanying drawings, along with a Snow White Model sheet that was also thrown in, belonged to him.

I hope the heavy dose of imagery, above, will be enough to sustain you, as I relate a story. Or you can skip right over it, and go directly to the pictures.

Beginning at the age of five, I became obsessed with collecting Disney ceramic figurines. Not just any, by the way, I collected only those made by Evens K Shaw of American Pottery. The Gobels figurines, which were available at the J.L. Hudson company, did not, at five, look "accurate" to me. And thus, although they look good to me now, I threw away that opportunity. The series that I did collect came as close as anything made, in those days, to looking like the Disney imagery that one saw, only, in the movies. Even they were not all great. Bambi and his friends were OK, But the Dumbo series was badly painted, in shades of pink and gray. And Fantasia was far from fantastic, but I had them anyway. Then, again, there were a few, Pinocchio on his way to school, especially, that drove me crazy with its sheer beauty.

Meanwhile, whenever my parents and I went for a ride, my nose was pressed to the car window, certain I would see Disney Figurines on display in every store we passed. It never happened. By seven, I realized that only one gift shop in Detroit carried them! And, whenever new ones were produced, they ordered just one set.

Approaching my eighth birthday, I contracted my first, and worst, case of acute Collector's Anxiety. Passing that store, one day, I saw Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in the window. They took my breath away. These were nearly good enough to have been done by the Disney character model department. Transfigured, I began my charm campaign. I had mastered the "catch more flies with honey" theory, early on. Or, at least, I thought I was being sweet and charming, actually, I drove my parents crazy. That set of Disney figurines was all I thought about, all I talked about, all I dreamt about! I wanted those amazing images with a passion that exceeded any desire I had ever known, to date. And I was certain, even though, as my parents pointed out, they were too expensive, that they were destined to mine, anyway.

Then disaster struck! Several days later, we went downtown, close enough to where I could run a couple blocks to take a look at my heart's desire in the window of that shop. As I got nearer, my heart sank, and I went into shock. I could see, from half a block away, that they were gone! And I knew they were the only set that would ever appear in Detroit. I was inconsolable. I cried myself to sleep, that night, and for several nights, thereafter.

With my birthday two weeks away, I was convinced that my heart would break, by the time that day arrived. Finally, my parents could stand it no longer, and took pity on me. One night, they led me from my tear soaked bed to the hall closet, and pointed out, well out of reach, on a high shelf, a plain brown corrugated carton, a big one. "There they are", they said, "safely waiting for your birthday. But. you can't have them until then, Now, please calm down. and go back to bed!"

Immediately, a tidal wave of happiness washed over me, and lifted my spirits right up to that high shelf, where I deposited my heart, beside the eight fragile figurines for safe keeping, waiting for my eighth birthday. I have never forgotten that feeling, that moment when I was catapulted, from the depths of despair to the heights of elation. It was a state of exquisite exaltation that I sought to replicate, again and again, in later years. The pattern for my collecting passion was being formed, right there and then.

Was the wait, from that point on, until my birthday, agony? Absolutely Not! It was delicious! During those two weeks, I learned to feast upon the joys of expectation, savoring every morsel of anticipation. And when the day arrived, the glorious figures that I lovingly unwrapped, one at a time, were everything I hoped they'd be. Snow white with her huge hollow yellow dress, so fragile, her face so pleasant, with big brown eyes, perfectly painted. And every dwarf was sculpted to perfection. All had glittering foil labels, each with the character's name incised. There was nothing that I didn't like about this, once in a lifetime, birthday present.

And thus, from the age of eight till eighteen, when I went away to college, that set of figurines remained my most treasured possession. It might surprise you to see my bedroom, when I was sixteen. It was really quite Spartan, compared to Mouse Heaven.

I had only a few cherished treasures, and some other crap that is embarrassing, stuff that in my immaturity, I thought was neat, a fish mobile, and a fiberglass fish lamp, so 1950s! My parents chose those awful Grecian heads when they bought the furniture, wholesale, naturally, a desk at which they hoped I would become a scholar. And, there, in a single showcase, beneath the window are for my two most treasured possessions, a book, "The Art of Walt Disney", that I had sought, since I was four, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Throughout the years, my appreciation of these perfect icons never diminished. I would sometimes stare at them for hours, as my eyes and mind wandered over every form and feature, like a small ant, crawling slowly, and loving every inch of the journey, savoring the scenery.

Now this story takes a twist. The ending is a sad one, in spite of a small Miracle. Fast forward several years, to find Eunice and I, living in a loft on East 26th Street in Manhattan. It was on the top floor of a warehouse, five walk up stories high, and just beneath the roof, which had no insulation. It was sweltering in summer, with little heat in winter; just a vast empty space, 100 feet long by 30 feet wide. Samantha could ride her bike inside. We had no money, most of the year, but the rent was only $100 a month, and we ate a lot of “Metrical” because it was cheap, at $7 a week. Just add water! That is the good part. The bad, is the fact that it was a lot like the Diary of Ann Frank, hiding from the fire inspectors. Lofts were all illegal, then, a detail we didn’t realize when we moved in. Five years passed, while we just minded our own business, called, “Boutique Fantastique.”

My collection of Disney figurines had been left in my mother’s care, carefully wrapped and packed, by me, in several cartons, in the the storage area of the condo that she rented, after the House on Seven mile Road was sold.

It took me years to fully appreciate the depth of the animosity my mother felt towards me for running off to Paris, 9 months after my father died, and leaving her alone with no dutiful son to command, and nothing to do, but continue to play canasta with “the girls,” nine times a week, as she had done all her life, up to that time. And, as if that wasn’t bad enough, I came back from Europe with a "War Bride", which was Eunice in her eyes; and to add insult to injury, got her pregnant, and gave my mother a granddaughter, Samantha, who she was not enchanted by.

And so, it came to be that, four years later, I made the mistake of asking my mother to send me my Disney figurines. I’ll never forget going to the post office to pick them up.

This is how she packed them, or I might better say, unpacked them: Instead of leaving them well padded, in their securely sealed cartons, and pasting on an address label, she carefully unpacked them, about 45 figurines, and placed them, naked, without any wrapping or packing, not even a piece of newspaper to keep them from clinking against one another, in two brown paper grocery bags. This is not even a method I would chance to carry them from one room to another, let alone, what she did next! She taped the top edges of the bags shut, wrote an address on the sides and mailed them, just like that! I guess, it should be no surprise to learn that one bag arrived with no more than a pile of broken pottery, inside. The other bag MIRACULOUSLY survived. It contained Snow White and the Magnificent Seven, as well as Pinocchio who lost his head on the trip. But I was able to glue it on, again.

This Miracle was bitter sweet. On the plus side, she had put some token insurance on the contents, and I was able to collect on the one bag, there and then. The fact was, I needed the money, even though, it was a pittance; small compensation, indeed. In order to collect it, I had to give the Post Office the bag of broken pieces. I handed it over the counter. There might have been something in that pile of Humpty Dumpty fragments that I could have put back together again. But, as they say, “That’s the breaks!”

I wish I could believe that this story had, at least, half a happy ending, because my beloved Snow White set survived. But, sadly, try as I might, I could never see them the same way again. This once precious gift had become toxic to me, a poison Hallmark Valentine, the kind one sends if they care enough to do their very worst. My mother wore her vacuousness, like a coat, mink, naturally, protecting her from all responsibility! It’s that blonde thing, you see! As if she didn’t know that was no way to mail those china figurines; as if she thought they wouldn’t break; as if she wasn’t fully aware of everything they meant to me.

And so the survivors are crammed onto a crowded shelf, along with some other Snow White stuff, in the farthest corner of the showcases upstairs, those that I rarely see. Even though, there are sliding glass doors, the dust has, nonetheless, crept in, over the years, and covered them with a dingy coat of gray. And I forget that they are there. I forget, that is, until some visitor inevitably asks “What item, of all these things, did you get first?” I answer, “These! These Snow White figurines. They were a birthday present from my parents, when I was eight”.

So here they are! On the shelf behind them, are the rather voluptuous velvet dolls made by Krueger. And at the very back (impossible to see) are the nicest Snow White graphics I have seen on any toy, the “Tap-Away” Set.

Here is the rather lyrical and wonderful set of Plaster figurines by Leonardi of Italy. They sit atop the Mickey Mouse Circus Train showcase, in the hall. I know we’ve seen this case, already, but they deserve a photo of their own.

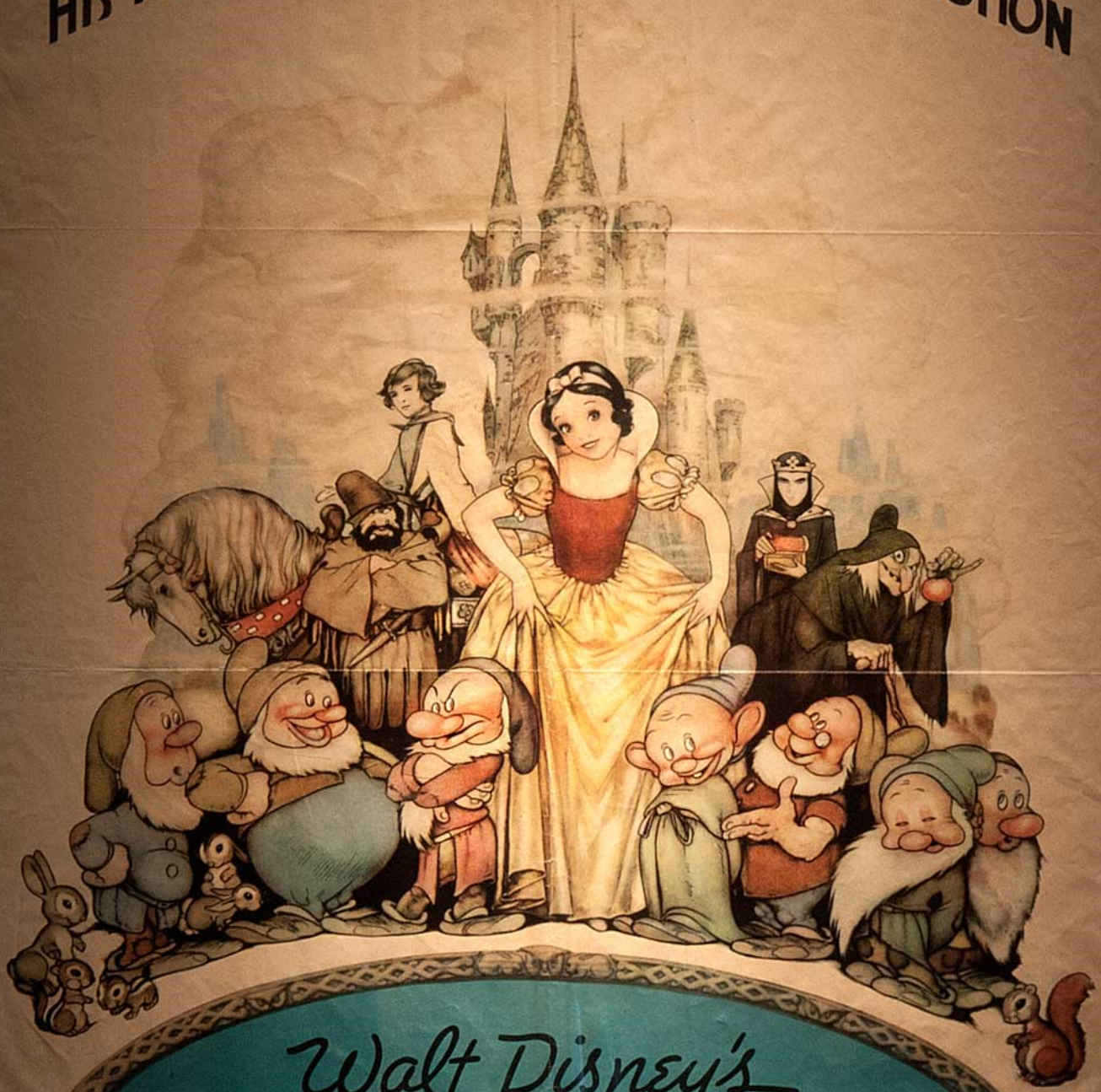
Sitting, atop a showcase in the foyer, leading to the sunroom, is a curious set of Snow White and the Dwarfs, made of some sort of composition cellulose material that resembles, but is, not quite, porcelain. They were made in England by Wade Ceramics Ltd. in 1938. This is an interesting set. Nothing about them is quite "right". Yet, either in spite of, or because of their strangeness, and almost grotesque characterizations, as well as the glaringly bright and inaccurate colors, they have become one of my favorite sets.

The figurines, above, are much more exciting than this rather reserved set of toothbrush holders by Maw of England. Maw's earlier Disney tooth brush holders of Mickey and Minnie and their friends were rather exquisitely sculpted. That, alas, is not the case with Snow White and the S

Here is another Snow White item that is as exciting as it is rare and understated. This is the little known Music Box, made by Marx Bros. of Boston, which is no relation to either the Movie star Marx Brothers, or Louis Marx. Marx Bros. made some of the most graphically dynamic Disney items throughout the 1930s. This item is unique, in that it does not use a generic music box, but actually plays the Dwarf's marching song "High Ho!" When the knob is wound, the Dwarf wheel rotates to allow them to appear, one at a time and pass before Snow White. The material is paper on wood, which was a medium, also used extensively, by Fischer Price.

Of all the Snow White imagery, the most beautiful is this rendition, drawn by Gustav Tenggren, a Swedish-American Illustrator, seeped in Old World tradition, who designed much of the film. His interpretation although, far removed from the final Disney stylization of the characters, was chosen to become the Movie Poster.

HIS FIRST FULL LENGTH FEATURE PRODUCTION



Walt Disney's

Snow White

and the Seven Dwarfs

in the Marvelous

MULTIPLANE TECHNICOLOR

©W D P

Distributed by RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.

In the lower corner of the Big showcase in the Hall, is a lovely set of celluloid figures that, in form, are closely related to the Tenggren interpretation of the characters. Dopey here looks as childlike as he does in the movie poster.

Last of all, is this spectacular set of Ceramic Lawn Ornaments. They were made by a renowned French Art Deco Ceramicist of the era. Fully signed and licensed by Disney on the inside, the back of each dwarf has his name, in French, incised in the ceramic. Some of these names are a surprise. The French names of the Dwarfs are:" Atchoum" (Sneezy), "Dormeur" (Sleepy), "Grincheux" (Grumpy), notice that the Grinch was also derived from this French word," Joyeux" (Happy), "Prof" (Doc), "Simplet" (Dopey) and "Timide" (Bashful).

The thing that I like best about this set is the fact that the artist's hand takes precedence over the Disney imagery. His identity is foremost, and yet, they are also the Disney Characters, but with a twist that is distinctively French. Dopy, especially, has that look of French comic vulgarity, that one sees so often expressed in caricatures in France. And, over all, there is a decorative and fanciful black line that has a life of its own, and wanders across the surface of the entire set.

Getting these through customs, at the air freight depot, was a nail-biting nightmare. I was there with my small station wagon, at the main customs building, at JFK Airport. The ceramics had arrived by plane in a huge wooden crate. When the overzealous customs inspector discovered that there were traces of French soil on the figures feet, he announced that I would have to send them back to France. I said, "I don't want the dirt! Can't the figures stay in the United states, and send just the dirt back?" The agriculture inspector had to be summoned. When he didn't show up, after an excruciating three hour wait, the outraged customs inspector was irate. He shouted, "If they don't care, neither do I! Get them the Hell out of here!" And, I did! I hurriedly packed them into my small car, and left the crate behind!

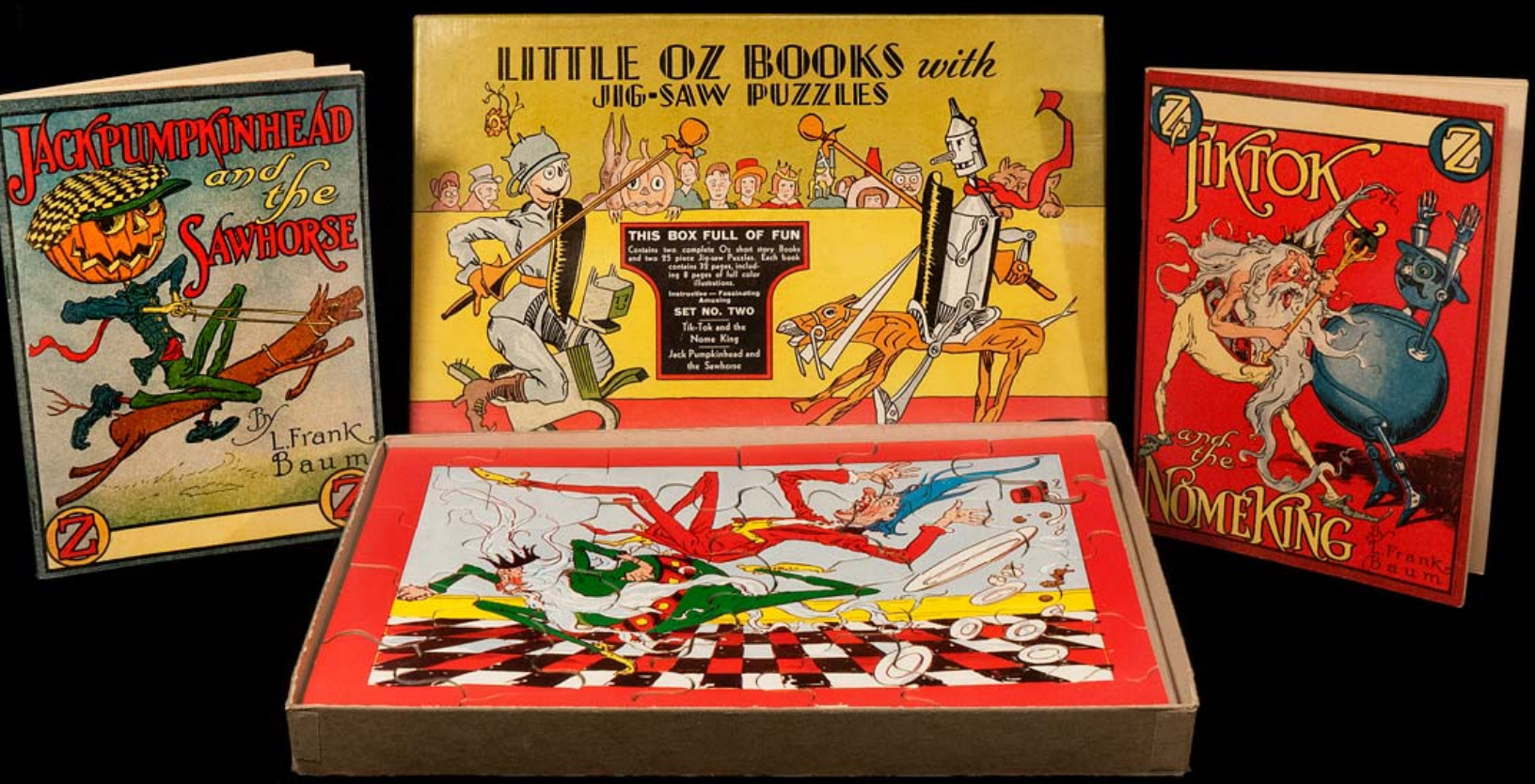
MICKEY MOUSE

WIZARD OF OZ

When I was a little kid, there were Oz books in our cellar. My father got them at the "Good Will". But, because they frightened me, he stored them in a basement cupboard, waiting for me to get older. On rare occasions I would work up the courage to sneak down the basement stairs and peek between the covers. The awesome illustrations were deliciously terrifying. The Scoodlers with their two hideous faces, and Princess Languidere, who casually balanced a different head atop her cleanly severed neck, each day, were better than a nightmare. But scariest of all was the Nome King with his wild and wooly whiskers. I studied him with fascination, as long as I dared, then, hurriedly scurried up the stairs.

It was not the stories, but rather the illustrations of John R. Neill that fired my imagination. I never saw the original edition with illustrations by Denslow. For some reason that was no longer in the Oz book series, as they appeared, fat and oozing with illustrated goodness in the bookstores of Detroit, in my day. Instead the original story was always represented by a large skinny volume that didn't fit the format, and had bland and boring 1940s illustrations, reminiscent of those in my first grade reader, "Dick and Jane". It must have been a copyright thing, or something to do with the movie. Clearly, the Denslow edition was forbidden.

I never was a facile reader, but I plowed through many of the other Oz books. The stories often freaked me out, but I loved the illustrations and the characters, Tick-Tock and Jack Pumpkin head, especially. I never actually read the original Wizard of Oz, until years later. I couldn't bring myself to accept that blandly illustrated 1940s version. I simply knew it wasn't "right".



On the other hand, the book that introduced Jack, the second in the series, "The Marvelous Land of Oz" was really creepy. In it, young Tip, the hero of the story, is transformed into a girl, in the end. And that they called "a happy ending"? That was even worse than when Bambi grew up or Pinocchio became "Real".

But I did see the Denslow version in a classroom at Hampton Elementary School. There on the bookshelf was “The Wizard of Oz Waddle Book”. In my eyes the novelty of the Waddles was everything; the Denslow illustrated story came in a distant second. This volume became the source of an obsession, and the beginning of a lifelong quest. At every opportunity, when there was a pause or break in the proceedings, an enforced time for quiet reading, I would head for that bookshelf and carry the Waddle book back to my desk, and stare at it intently, as if by sheer willpower I could make the missing “Waddles “ reappear. I paid no attention to the story, nor did I appreciate the Denslow illustrations. My eyes focused only on the instruction pages that graphically displayed in black and white diagrams the complexity of the paper cutouts, and, of course, the cover that showed the deliciously flat characters in full color, waddling down the Yellow Brick Ramp. This book spoke to me of unseen wonders, unseen, because they were simply missing. Did they ever exist, really? Or was I just hallucinating?

I never forgot about that book. And throughout all the years that followed, at every remotely appropriate opportunity, I would ask about the waddle book. Then, one day, when Eunice and I were living in New York City, I met young Justin Schiller. At sixteen he was already a Wizard of Oz wiz, exceedingly impressive in his knowledge and enthusiasm, and he offered me a Waddle book, naturally with the Waddles missing. But I visited his house in Brooklyn and purchased it, gladly. Ironically, at that meeting, sitting there, before a bookcase full of the most Wonderful Wizard of Oz collection, the Oz book, suddenly, became secondary, solely, because of something that he told me: namely that the Wizard of Oz Waddle Book had been preceded by one that featured Mickey Mouse. Oh My God! The rest is history.

Yes, as you can see, I finally got a Wizard of Oz Waddle Book. Two, actually, the other is unpunched, mint, breathtakingly perfect and pristine, and this one, below, which came to me already punched out, gets a showcase of its own, along with a few of the other “real” Wizard of Oz items that have come my way.

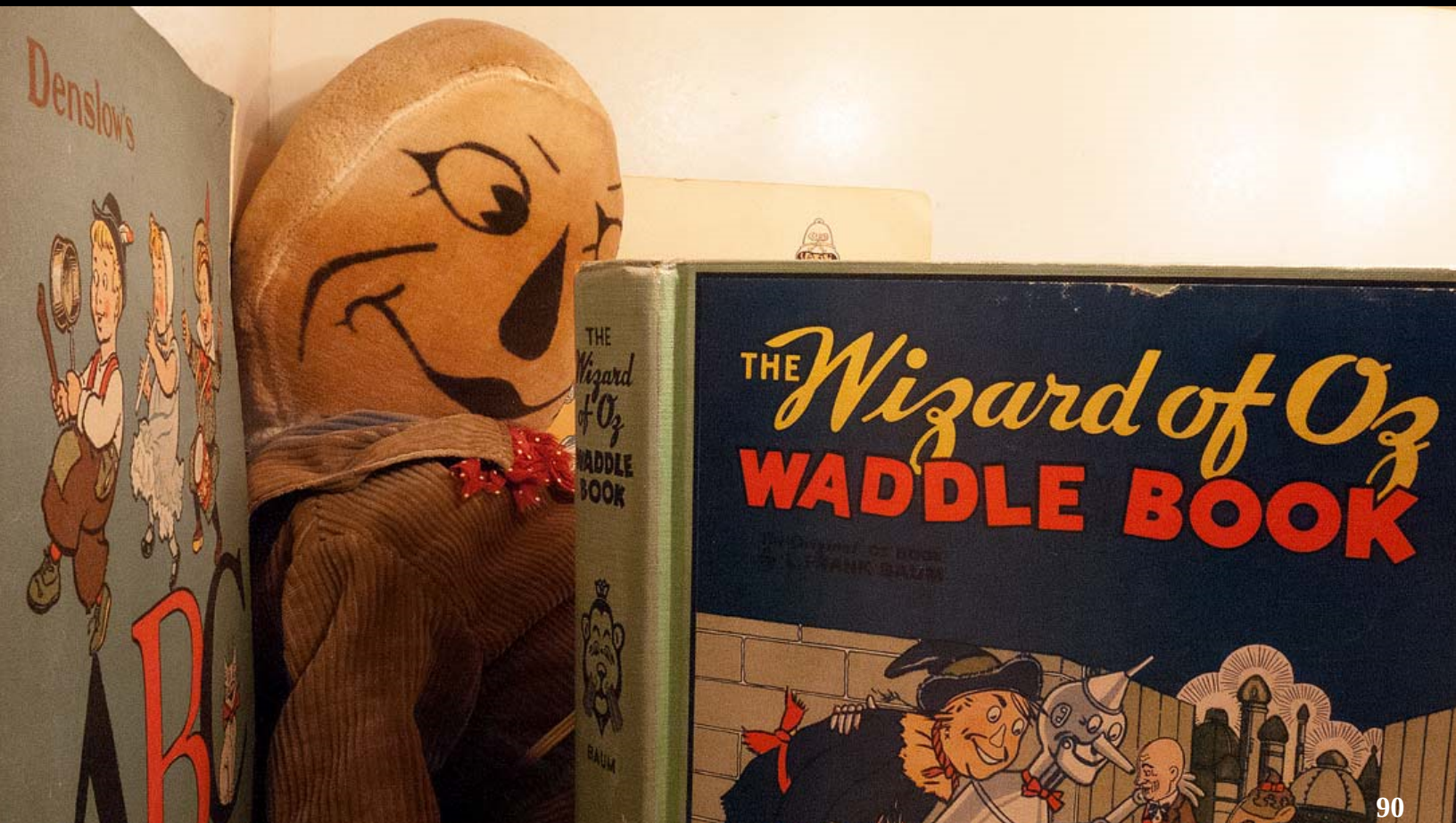
DEADLY
DESERT
WINKIE
OOGABOO
IMPASSABLE
GILL
SHAGGY MAN
POLYCHROME
TIK-TOK
BILLINA
WINGED MONKEY
SAW HORSE
HOOT
FOLD

DEADLY
WINKIE
OOGABOO
IMPASSABLE
SHAGGY MAN
POLYCHROME
BILLINA
FIELD OF PUMPKINS
REAR LEFT LEG
FRONT LEFT LEG
Denslow's
SCARECROW
and
TIN-MAN

The Movie with Judy Garland, in spite of its beloved familiarity, never seemed quite "real" to me. It was more about Hollywood than Oz. That is not to say that, after years of annual brainwashing, it didn't carve out a warm spot in my heart, but not in my collection. I only have a few early Oz things. And I have yet to see evidence that there were a lot made. Apart from the many books, and some exceedingly rare and attractive advertising displays, Oz did not appear to generate a lot of toys or merchandise, in its day. There are two versions of "The Wonderful Game of Oz," with its beautiful cover art. But, only the game board and the figural playing pieces made it into the above showcase.

In the right corner of the showcase, is a curious mechanical device from the early era. Its patent date is 1919. The object itself is very heavy and is designed to sit in front of the the turntable of a phonograph. An elliptical wheel, resting on the record, animates three generic dancing figures, a “Ballet Dancer”, a “Dancing Darky”, and one that is clearly modeled after the Scarecrow of Oz. “Modeled after” is a polite way of saying, traced. The original box makes no mention of Oz, and refers to the figure as “Scare-Crow”.

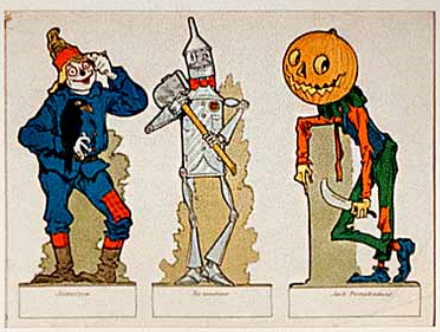
Reclining in the rear, is a Scarecrow doll that is also of the Denslow era. It radiates the kind of glow that age alone, not wear and tear, can bestow.

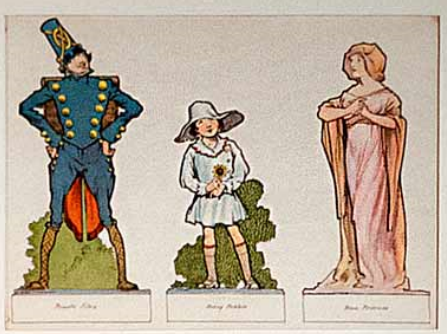


In stunning contrast, in a separate showcase we visited already, is the same doll in incredible condition. It was sold to me by a dealer at the Allentown Toy show who had purchased it from a 90 year old woman who had it in a trunk in her attic, untouched since she received it as a child. This doll has only one shortcoming; it simply looks too new, too mint to be credible. But it is real, and is still attached to its original wood display pole, so it can stand, or hang, alone, as it did in the cornfield. A yellow ribbon that reads, "Patent Pending" is still intact.

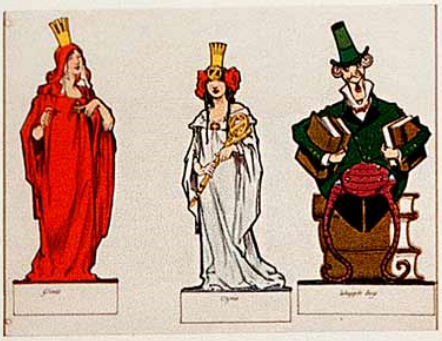
The much later doll, representing Ray Bolger, and generated by the movie, pales by comparison.

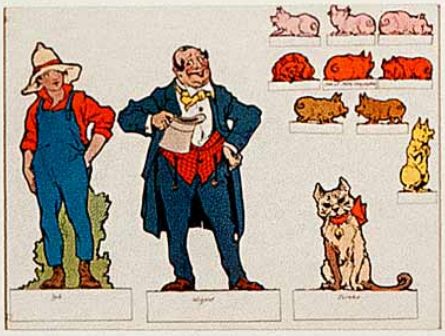
The imagery of the Wizard of Oz was truly phantasmagorical, and its endless stream of images were among the very first Comic Characters. They are nowhere better represented, outside of the covers of the actual Oz books, than in this 1915 rarity," The Oz Toy Book." Its pages were held in place by a ribbon, strung through two holes, so I did no damage framing it this way. Here are nearly all the Characters, each in its most iconic pose, drawn by John R. Neill, himself. I have seen cut pieces or odd pages from this rare book, over the years, but none were as perfect, or complete, as these.

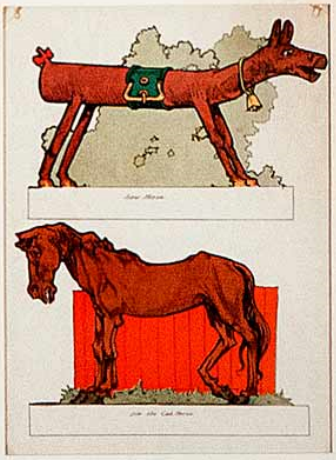


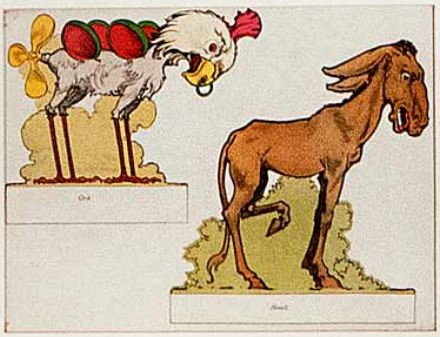


The OZ TOY BOOK
Cut-outs for the Kiddies
JNO. R. NEILL

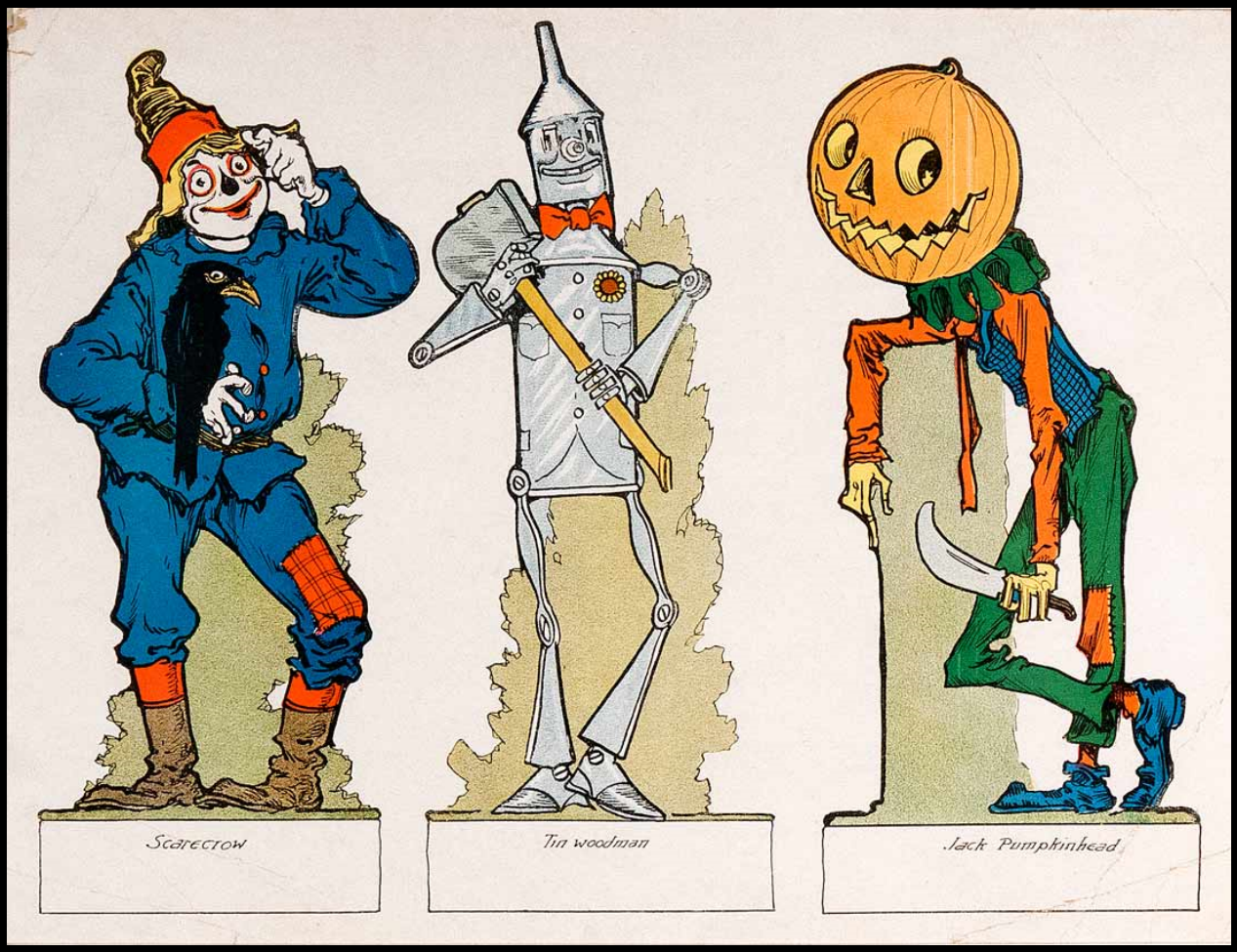


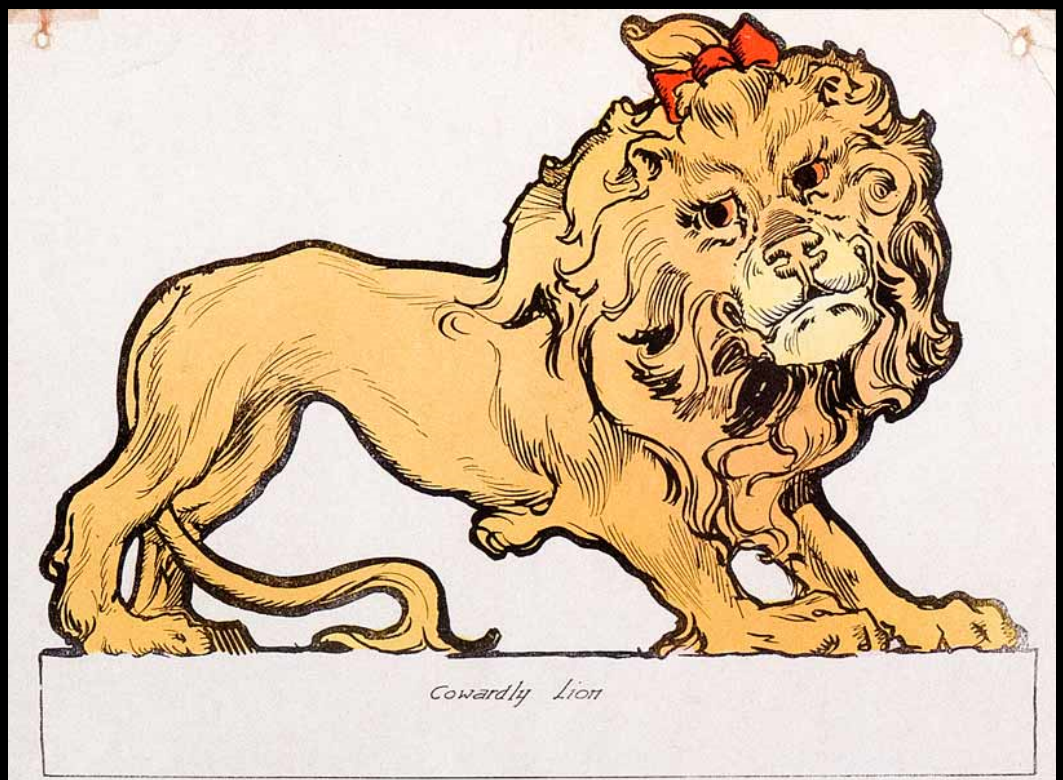


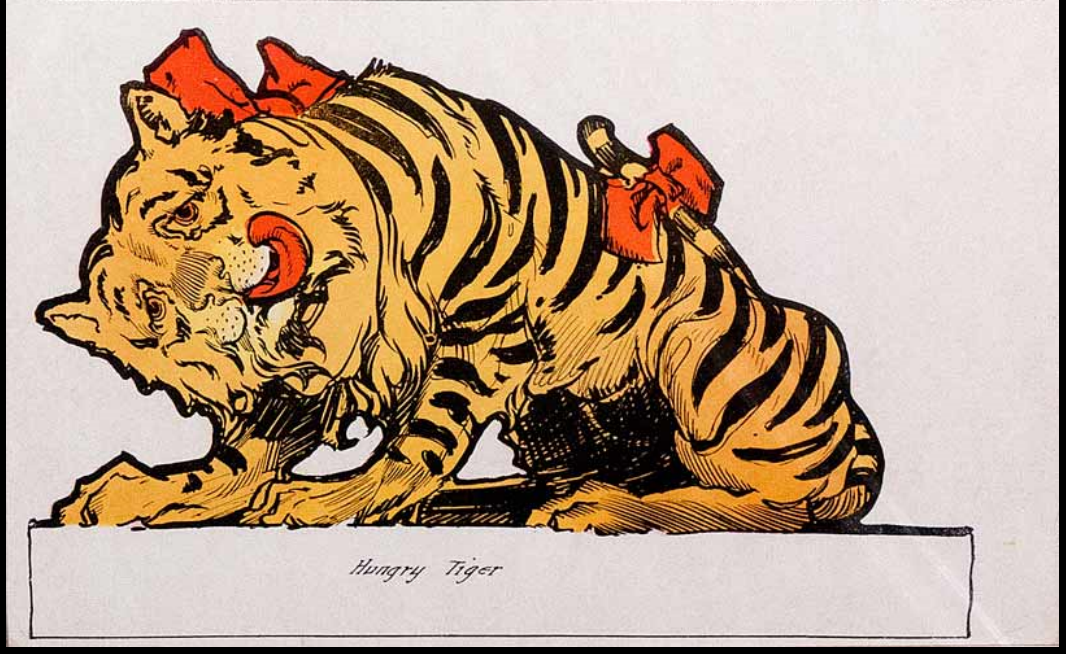




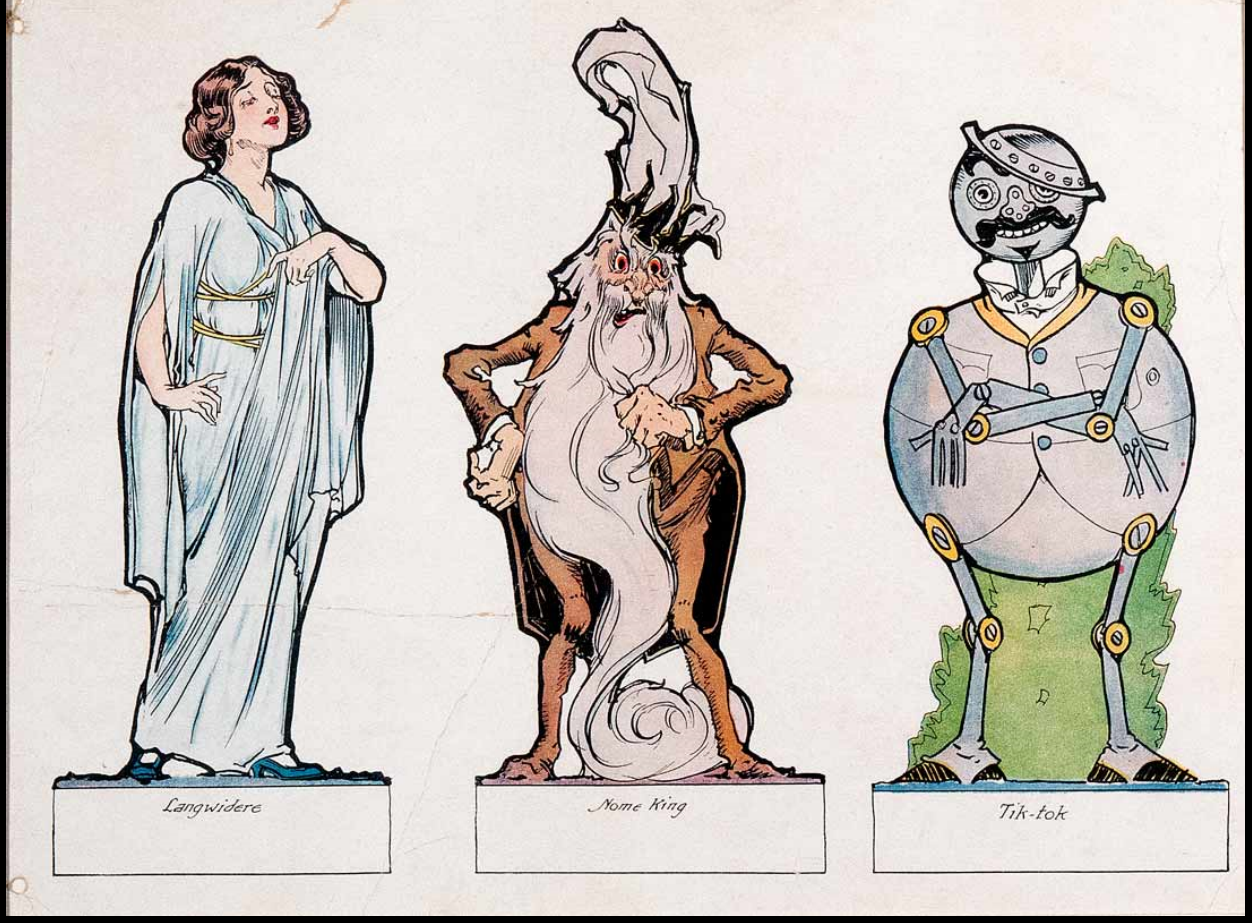
This book of cutouts is unique in ways that one might take for granted today, but in its time, it must have been amazing, a monumental undertaking. Full color printing was not all that commonplace. And for the original illustrator to be lending his best efforts to a "toy" is a situation that would be unlikely today. Even then, Imagine how amazing it would be if John Tenniel had drawn a cutout book of all his characters from "Alice"!

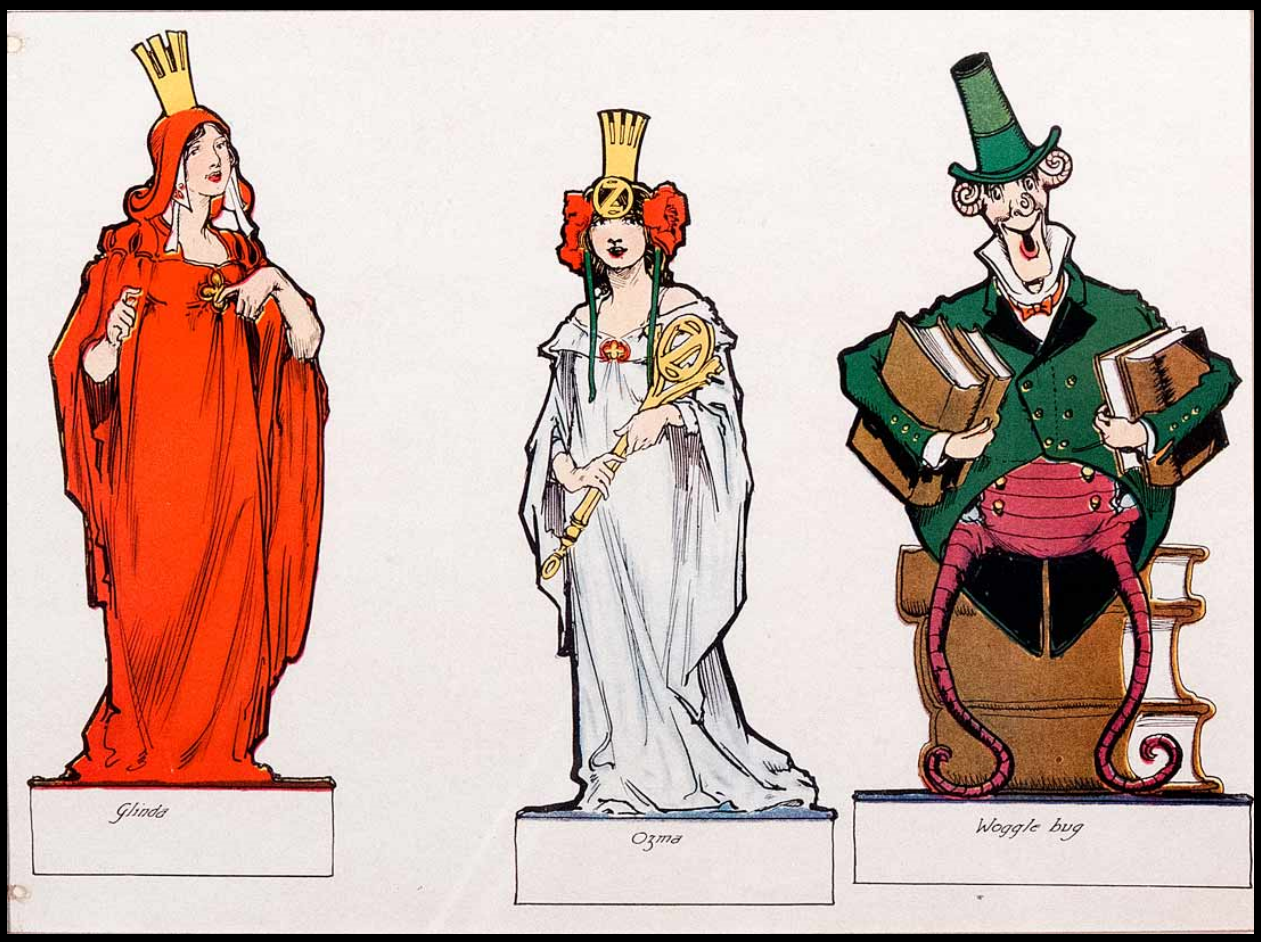






I read an interesting blog, this morning, talking about the Oz Toy Book. Apparently, it was published without Frank Baum's knowledge, and the publisher, Reilly and Britton, had a lot of apologizing to do when he found out. What really jumped out was the statement that Baum was not all that happy with John R, Neill as the Oz illustrator, and suggested to his publisher that Winsor McCay (Little Nemo in Slumberland) or George McManus (Bringing Up Father) be hired to take his place. Wow! He felt that Neill did not capture the humor of his stories. I sometimes wondered if it was just my imagination, linking Oz to Comic Characters. It appears that, Frank Baum, himself, clearly saw that link as well.





The article goes on to state, "The original Toy Book is now one of the rarest of Oz collectibles; only four complete and intact copies are known to survive."

Say hello to number five!

BLUE RIBBON BOOKS

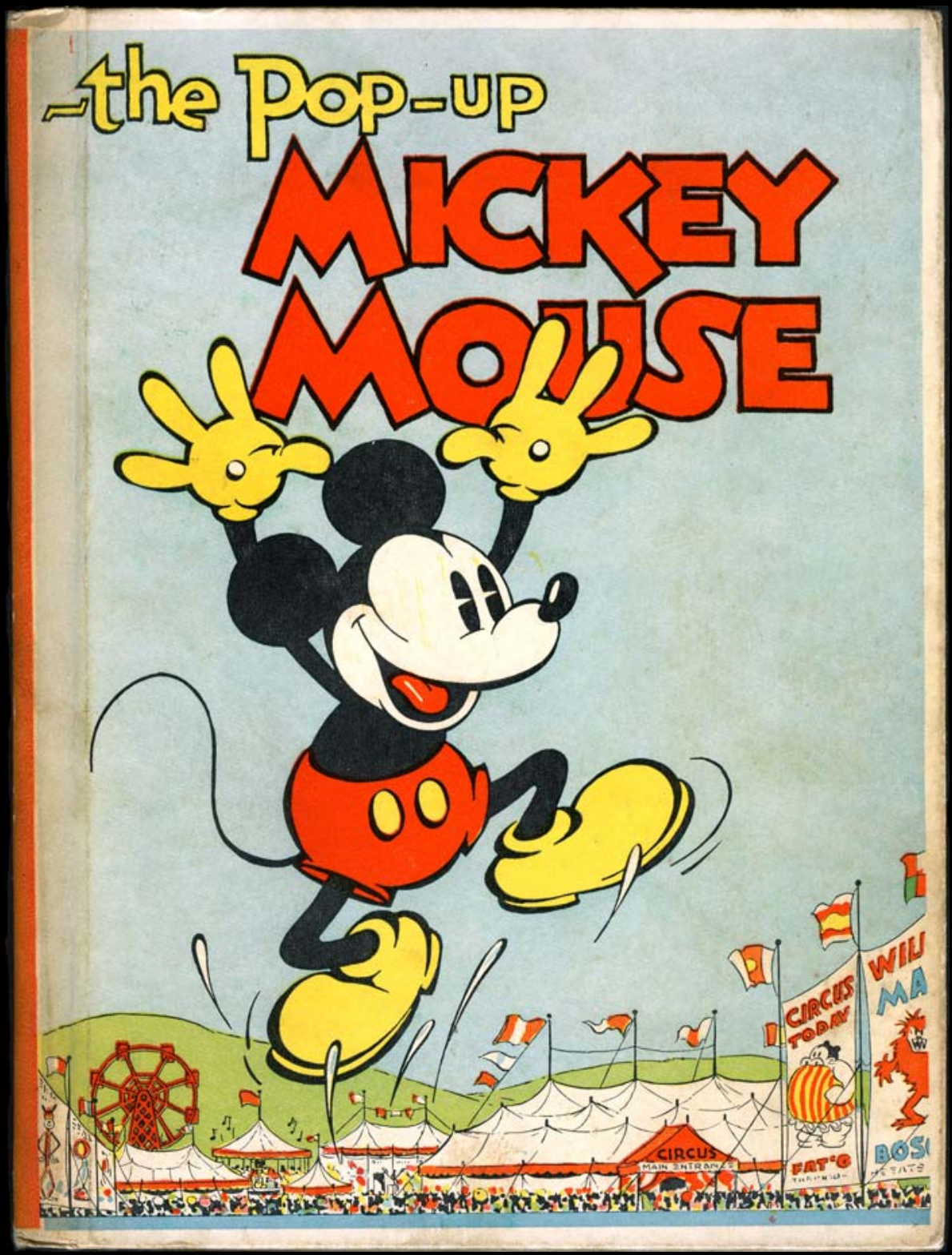
Growing up in the 1940s, there were some books called “Jolly Jump-ups.” They contained simple pop-up illustrations that folded out, resembling a flight of stairs. And there was also a series of animated story books by Julian Wehr that were, in their own weird way, fascinating. But, throughout my childhood, nothing as wonderful as The Blue Ribbon Pop-up Books, popped up. By the time my time began, Blue Ribbon Books had come and gone.

I discovered them, years later, in my quest for Mickey. When I did, I was amazed, and immediately drawn in, not so much by their clever construction, which was fantastic for its time, but more by the quality of the art inside, and the voluptuous thick-thin modulation of their brush drawn lines. One could isolate even a small section of the most incidental artwork, and discover that it contained all the visual excitement of a painting. My friend, John Fawcett did that very thing, for what might have been his most successful show, at the OK Harris Gallery.

This is one of the final pages I have tackled for this website. I have been avoiding it, because it necessitated opening the coffee table, as many of the Pop-up books reside, inside. But, I, finally, did it, and what a job it was! It took all day, removing all the stuff on top, replacing light bulbs, cleaning glass, photographing the books, then, putting it all together again. It was late at night, by then! That's when I took this shot. I should have had a shot of gin, instead!

Now that I have photographed a variety of the Pop Up pages, I can pretty much, shut up! They speak for themselves!

Here is the first, "The Pop-up Mickey Mouse." The cover, with its exuberant image of Mickey, captures the essence of excitement. I have often wondered who illustrated this amazing series. I know the books were engineered by Sam Gold Novelty Company, here on the East Coast. But the Illustrations are attributed to the Disney Studio. According to Ward Kimball, the animators at Disney disliked these illustrations, intensely, and made them the subject of jokes and ridicule. This statement always troubled me. I find these drawings to be superior to anything I ever saw generated by Disney, outside of an actual animated movie. And I might add that, unlike the average Disney storybook illustrations, there is nothing about them that is sugar coated, or cutesy. They have not been doused with pixie dust

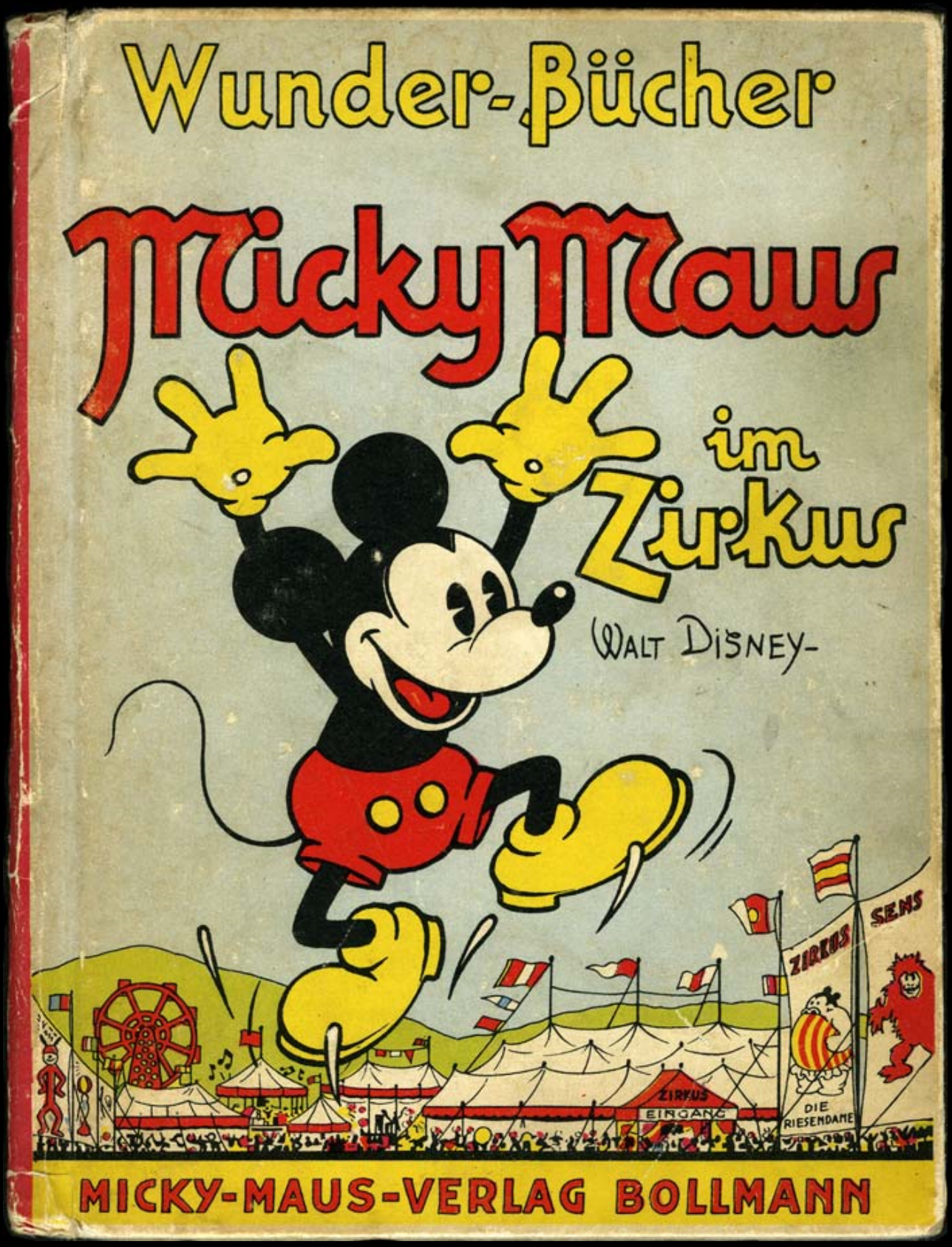


The central Pop-up is a single figure of Mickey, who pops up from the page. His simple shapes stand out against a background that displays a riot of deft and busy penmanship. One of Mickey's most ingenious design features was his bright white face. That aspect of he and Minnie is utilized to good advantage, throughout the series of Pop-up books. Often, these character's white faces stand out in an environment that is fully colored in. The Disney organization, later, threw this visual advantage away, when, in a rush towards "reality," they colored their faces pink.

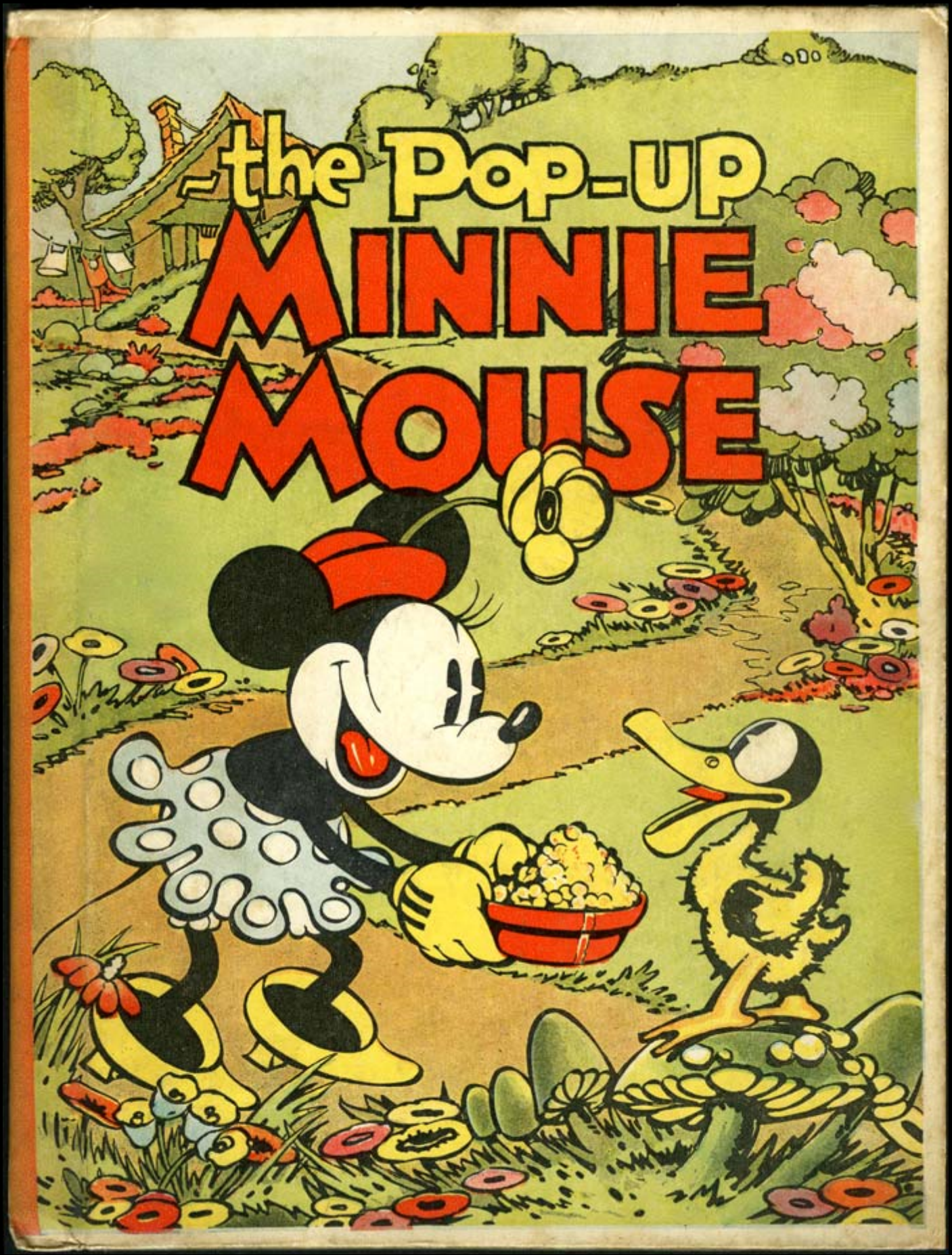
In Both the Mickey and the Minnie Pop-up, the major Pop-up page was located in the middle of the book. There were two simpler Pop-ups that used only one additional element to pop up, incorporated into the "endpapers," just, inside the front and back covers. These books sold for 75 cents, each. Here is the scene that begins the Mickey book:

Mickey and Minnie wave goodbye to a boatload of beautifully styled animals. Note the lyrical fluency of the sea; the foam and ripples are poetic. The dock that Mickey and Minnie are standing on appears to raise above the waves, on pylons. This is virtuoso draftsmanship!

A sprinkle of pixie dust might be what's needed here. This is the nasty German edition, with "Micky," hideously redrawn. How did they manage to make it look so ugly? Is it just my imagination, or does that harsh lettering have an aura about it that reminds one of a swastika?



"The Pop-up Minnie Mouse" was every bit as good as Mickey's book.

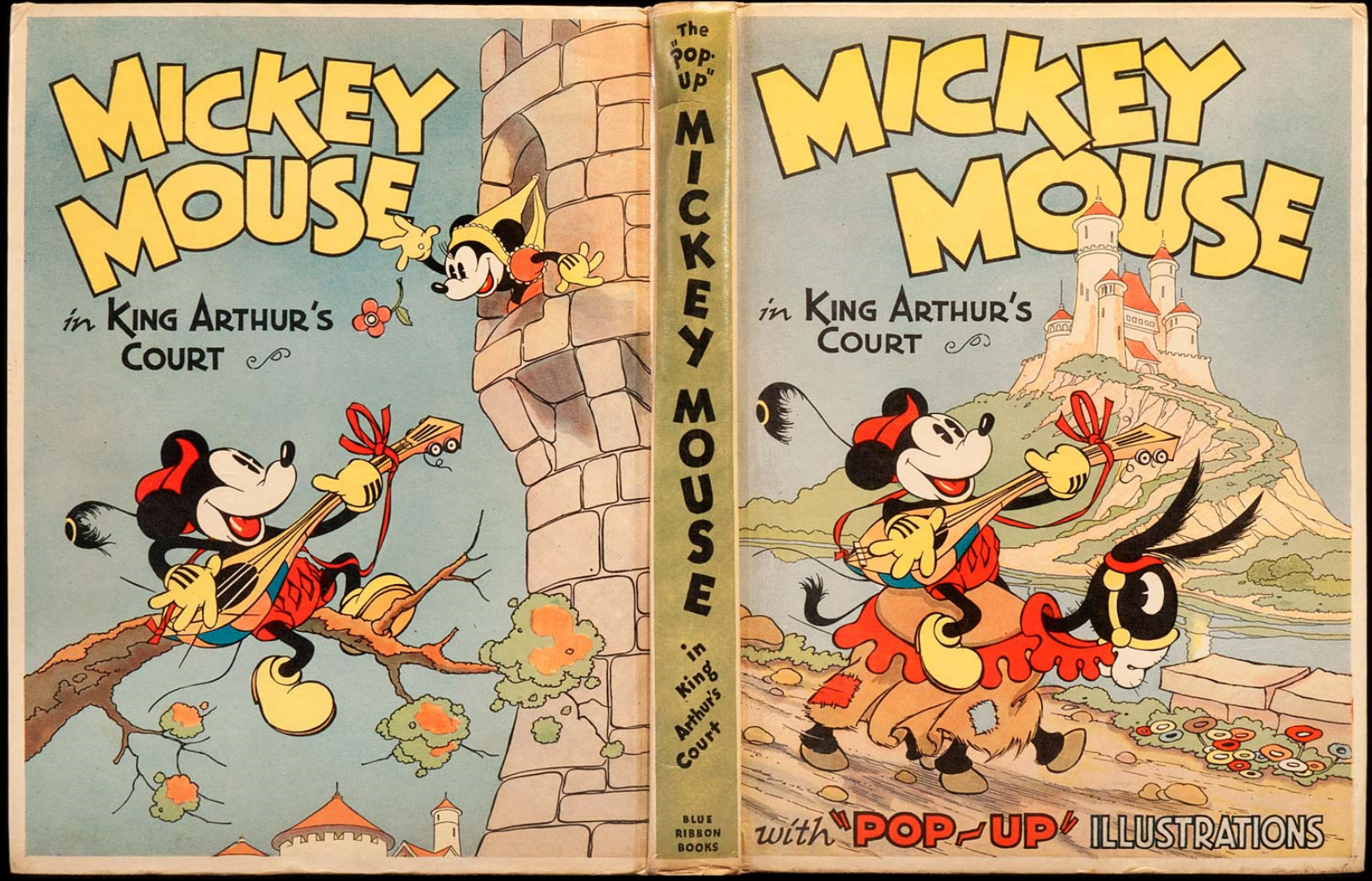


In terms of paper trickery, Minnie's book was more complex. Her voluminous skirt introduced an area of paper construction that, for its time, was groundbreaking.

Minnie's endpapers were not quite as interesting as Mickey's. But, the final one is rather pretty, while, at the same time, it displays the one touch of draftsmanship that is less inspired than the rest. While all the Pop-up art appears to be fresh and original, the figure and pose of barking Pluto, is based on standard pick up art.

Next, Mickey appeared in a fat volume, based on the cartoon, “Ye Olden Days,” called “Mickey Mouse in king Arthur’s Court,” a title inspired by Mark Twain! This book contains four complex Pop-ups, and sold for two dollars. Much more went into the creation of these volumes than one might realize. Beyond the complex Pop-ups, themselves, the paper that they were printed on had to be a special kind, developed in a lab, especially, for these books. And the bindings, too, were complicated, in that the four Pop-up pages had to be able to lay flat.

The cover of Mickey in King Arthur’s Court, had bright delicious images, on both the front and back. The endpapers had a spectacular drawing, as well. The flaps of the dust jacket are filled with some overheated rhetoric that one would later see outdone on the dust jacket of the Waddle Book. Sam Gold Novelties knew a lot about promotion, and it shows.


MICKEY MOUSE
in KING ARTHUR'S COURT
The "POP-UP" MICKEY MOUSE in King Arthur's Court
BLUE RIBBON BOOKS
MICKEY MOUSE
in KING ARTHUR'S COURT
with "POP-UP" ILLUSTRATIONS

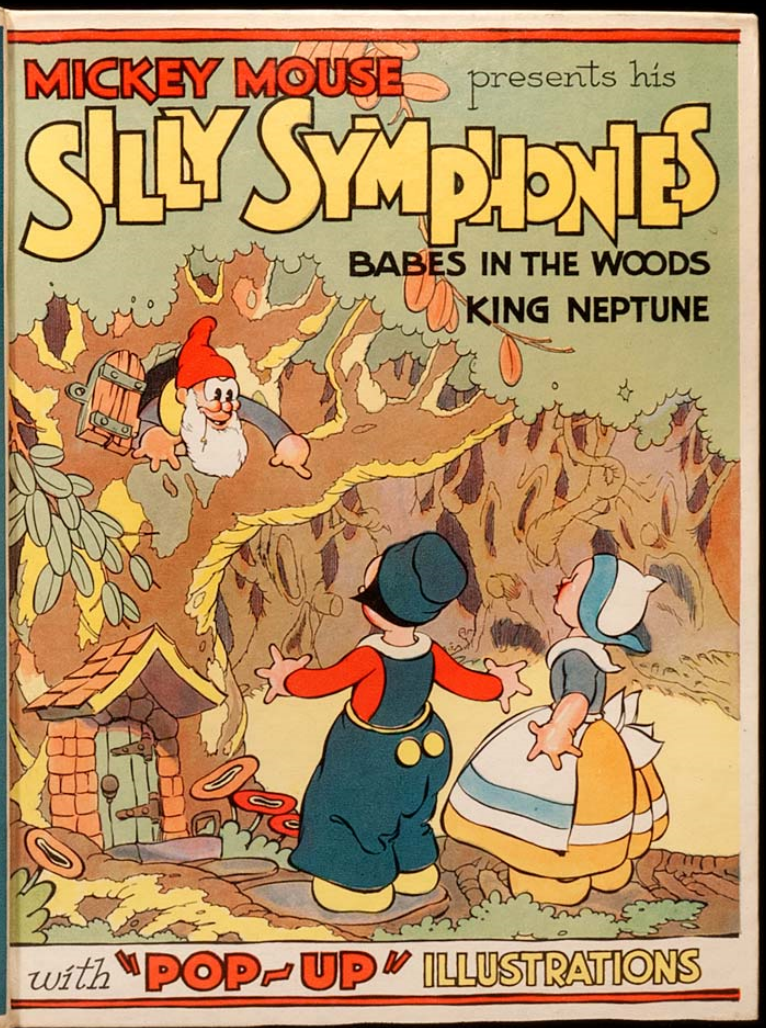
MICKEY MOUSE
IN
KING ARTHUR'S COURT
With Stories, Pictures, and "Pop-up" Illustrations by the Walt Disney Studios
When Mickey, the Minstrel, galumped down the road to Camelot on his trusty donkey, he little thought of the dangers and joy which his unusual introduction to court life would bring. In his heart there was a carefree happiness and on his lips a gallant song. And these he never lost, though he found his life at stake when he undertook to rescue the Princess Minnie from as cruel a fate as ever a pretty maiden has faced.
The Walt Disney Studios have captured in this book the same gay and lively humor with which they make Mickey Mouse live on the screen. Events follow each other with incredible speed, and the situation is as amusing as any in which you have ever seen this most popular of all juvenile characters.
In addition to the story and the numerous pictures in two colors, this book contains four pop-ups, designed and drawn by the Walt Disney Studios. They make Mickey a real figure who moves in and out of his own book, performing before your eyes the feats which the story describes.
See the Back Flap of this Jacket for a further list of titles in Pop-up Editions.

The last of the four Blue Ribbon Pop-up books, based on Disney, is this: “Mickey Mouse presents his Silly Symphonies.” Here, in this volume, the art work takes off. The details everywhere in the illustrations of the "Babes in the Woods" are more delicious than the candy on the house. And the Pop-up "King Neptune," emerges from an ocean, turbulent with fancy brushwork, gone wild. It is a tour de force of fancy thick-thin penmanship!

This coupling of these two early Silly Symphonies seems to have been very popular, at the time. But they are two very strange films. Babes in the Woods is, almost, about Hansel and Gretel, but not quite. It sort of previews the wicked witch from Snow White, and has a gang of dwarves, thrown in for good measure. The characters, throughout, remain distant and impersonal.

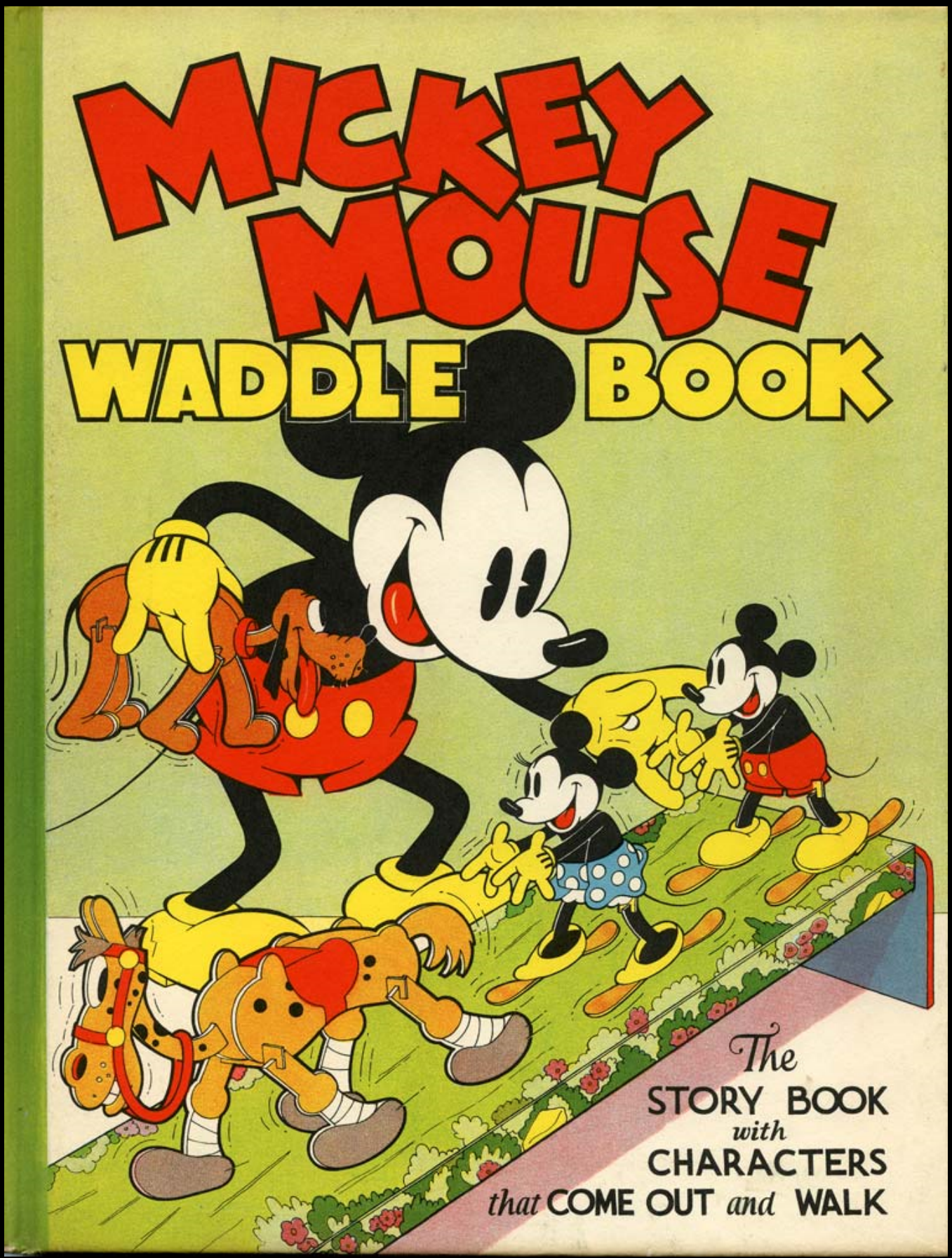
SILLY SYMPHONIES
KING NEPTUNE
BABES IN THE WOODS

The "POP-UP"
SILLY SYMPHONIES
BLUE RIBBON BOOKS


MICKEY MOUSE presents his
SILLY SYMPHONIES
BABES IN THE WOODS
KING NEPTUNE
with "POP-UP" ILLUSTRATIONS

King Neptune is even stranger. Disney has sort of buried this movie in Davey Jones' locker. In it, a shipload of lusty letcherous pirates attempt to abduct and molest a mermaid. King Neptune, a fat naked jolly old man, laughs sadistically, as he dramatically drowns the pirates, stomps on their ship, then, sits on it, sending them to a watery grave.

One Blue Ribbon publication that has floated to the top of the list of Mickey Mouse Collectibles, in terms of rarity and desirability, is the Mickey Mouse Waddle Book. It certainly played a major role in my adventures in collecting! And, right from the beginning, drove forward many a trade. In later years, it became an ever-present element in my friendship with Maurice Sendak.



On numerous occasions, Maurice asked me if I would assume the role of his "product director." I had done the Wild Things dolls, at his request, under the umbrella of my association with Colorforms, and, ironically, they turned out to be the longest selling item I ever made. But, as they never generated any Colorforms royalties, at the time, I never made a penny from them. Nor could I expect any remuneration from the other companies, who, later, continued to manufacturer my designs.

In the beginning, and right up to the end, they were the only Wild Things dolls that Maurice ever liked. And all the Wild Things dolls, sold today, are still based on my designs. The lines, printed on them, are still mine. Nonetheless, I always turned Maurice's offers aside, for several reasons. One being that I simply could not afford to do it. I was doing much better on my own. And, even if that were not the case, I didn't want to lead a life, forever in the shadow of Maurice.

But this much I can say with certainty, and much regret: If I had assumed that role, (we had discussed this, many times) there would have been a "Wild Things Waddle Book!"

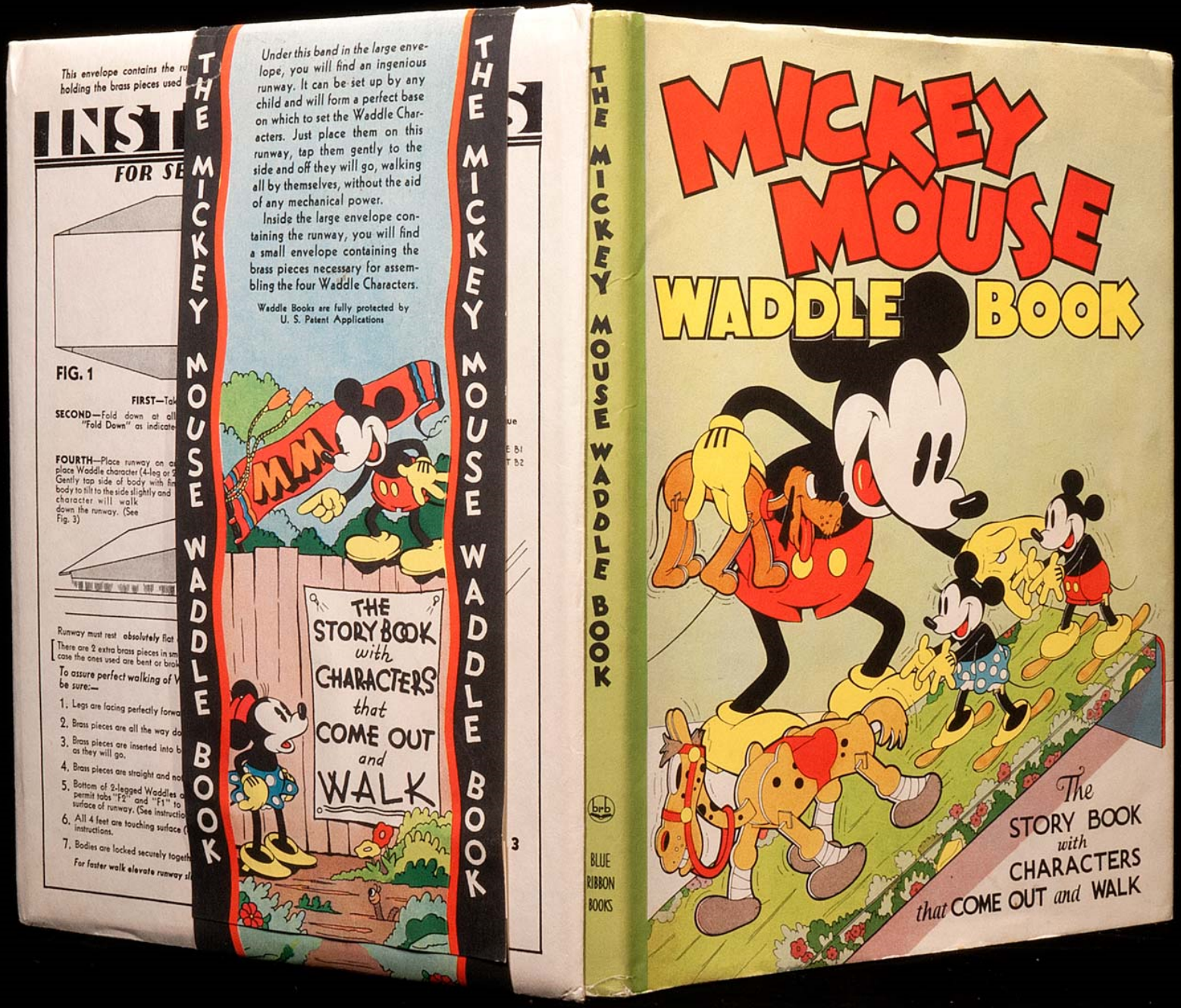
So what is it that is so alluring about this most Amazing book? Well the blurb on the cover says it all! It is "The Story Book with Characters that Come Out and Walk!" The copy inside the Dust Jacket goes on to explain: "This NEW MICKEY MOUSE WADDLE BOOK uses for the first time in the history of book-making a marvelous new invention (fully protected by patent applications), which gives to children a book with characters that walk. These animated three-dimensional figures come right out of the pages and, without the use of springs, or rubber bands, or delicate contrivances, walk with a fidelity to life which will delight any child." I couldn't have said it any better, myself!

In the Mickey Mouse Waddle Book, unlike the Wizard of Oz version, the pages, from which the Waddles are punched-out were tipped right into the book, itself. In the Oz book the punch-out pages were packed separately.

Here is the Book I traded from John Fawcett, who saved me the anguish of having to decide, whether or not, to punch the Waddles out, as it appeared in the Bamburgers show in 1973.

And here it is, as it proudly stands, showcase and all, in “The Hall” today.

As you will learn on the next page, I traded my un-punched waddle Book to Maurice. Subsequently, I got another one. It's not quite as perfect as the one I traded him, but it is good enough.



How does one define “Rare?” Is it something many know about, but few possess? Or would something be rarer, still, if it is so scarce that no one (who should) knows it exists? The following item is the rarest of the Rare; the rarest Blue Ribbon Publication, anyway, “The Mickey Mouse Midget Library of Books!”

I found myself on a treasure hunt, today, one, in which I did not succeed. I was looking for the place that I first learned about this item. I saw it mentioned, somewhere, early on. I thought that it was included in a list, on the back flap of the dust jacket of the Waddle Book. Not so! Nor was it listed in the Kay Kamen Catalogues, my second place to look. I even found myself returning to the Munsey Book. But there was no mention of it there. I know I was not hallucinating, I saw it listed, someplace, 45 years ago, and always wondered what it was. And when I got the only one, I exclaimed,” My God! This is it!”

I got this treasure at Brimfield, on a secret excursion to Kenny Chapman’s car. He opened up the trunk and there it was! He had discovered it, only Minutes, before. I don’t think he realized how unique and extraordinary this boxed set was. Well, neither did I, for this was years ago, and only time would tell the tale of its true rarity. I was excited, mainly, because the graphics of its cover thrilled me. This was fresh imagery, and beautifully done, clearly by the hand that drew the Pop-ups!

This memorable event took place, on the final day of the week long show, minutes before I headed home. It was a miracle that I made it home alive, for I placed it on the floor of the passenger seat, and, throughout the drive, my eyes were focused on it, more than they were on the road. Noel and I were driving in tandem in separate cars. He insisted that we stop in Hartford, to see the Mark Twain house. Although, I really enjoyed the tour, my thoughts remained with Mickey Mouse, on the passenger side floor.

In the past 45 years, "Ted Hakes Americana" has literally handled nearly every collectible item known. At least, one of everything has passed through their hands. So I was surprised when Ted's assistant called me up, mystified, a few months ago. They had been given two of the small books that this set makes, and they had no idea what they were.

So, without further build up, here it is "Make your own Midget Library - Including material for making your own Mickey Mouse Books" That is what the title on the box reads. Inside is just what the cover says, enough stuff to make several Mickey Books! There are full color covers, and many pages, printed in black and white, as well as several full color sheets of gorgeous, made to order, images of Mickey and Minnie, to cut out, and paste in place. Then, with the paints that the cover implies might have been part of the set, a child would color in the rest. There is an envelope of clips to hold the finished books together.

Many licensed properties rely on stock images, recycled endlessly. The contents of this fabulous set is all original art that appears only here, and is of the very highest quality. It would appear to be the work of same artist who did the Pop-up Books. The images of Mickey and Minnie are all brand new, and fresh! And the stories are as good as any in the Mickey Library.

And, the whole thing is displayed in the last showcase that we will see. It is the only one that, at this time, has not, yet, gone before the camera's eye. It is the last case along the couch, in the big room. And it contains some of the rarest things. It could have been included in several other categories, but, because of the Midget Library, I saved it for here.

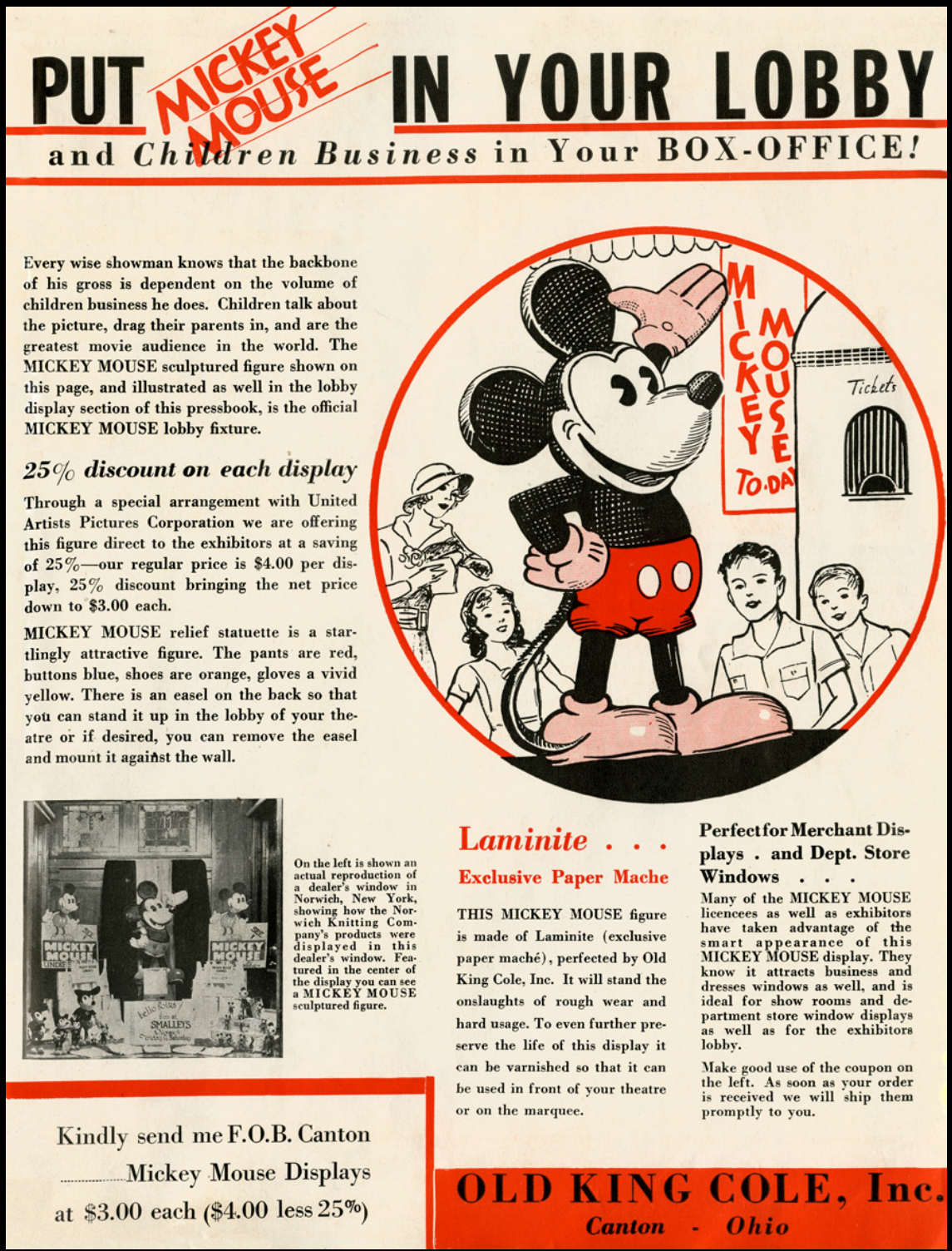
In the center of the showcase, and the reason a strong light is directed to bounce off the back, is the “Mickey Mouse Gummed Paper Toy Cinema.” How rare is that? The only other one known is the smaller version that I have upstairs. It was made in England, and it is a Shadow Theater, complete with many uncut sheets of Disney Characters and a playbook. It was made by a gummed sticker company. The gummed paper part consists of applying lick and stick colored panels to complete the facade of the stage. The actors are displayed behind a translucent screen. The scenery is made up of cut out pieces, too. The play book is grizzly, to say the least. The drama ends with Mickey and his friends, cutting off Peg Leg Pete’s Head. Clearly, the violent tradition of Punch and Judy, and France’s Grand Guignol, was alive and well in 1930s Britain. The cut figures of Mickey and Minnie, shown on stage, are Xeroxes, so, I wouldn’t need to cut the sheets, which are displayed on the left side of the case.

Somewhere, around the middle of the back wall of the showcase, the printed sheets change to those for the Midget Library. They are held in place by tiny pins. The box, itself, is against the back, on the right. It is somewhat obscured by the “Chad Valley Mickey Walk Along Toy,” which effects walking, in a weird way, by splitting the figure down the middle. Nonetheless, the graphics are terrific. On either end of the case, are two exceedingly rare Chad Valley animated pull toys, and across the front of the case, is a Mickey Mouse pull toy Parade, consisting of six figures that link together. Look carefully, to the right of the shadow theater’s screen, and you will see a celluloid Mickey doing his impersonation of Edvard Munch's painting, “The Scream.”

OLD KING COLE DISPLAY

Old king Cole Papier Mache Company, in Canton Ohio decorated America's stores and store windows by the thousands, throughout the first half of the 20th Century. They made it all! Everything from RCA Victor Nipper dogs to elaborate Christmas windows. They were licensed to make Disney displays from 1932 to 1942. And the incredible stuff they made, in that window of time, Mickey's Golden Age, staggers the imagination!

The first Disney item that Old King Cole manufactured was this iconic display figure of Mickey. It was used everywhere, from stores, selling Mickey merchandise, to theaters, showing Mickey Mouse cartoons. This is the page that introduced it in the 1932 Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies Campaign Book. The price for these was four dollars apiece, but, with the coupon on this page, theater owners could purchase them for just three dollars each.



PUT MICKEY MOUSE IN YOUR LOBBY

and *Children Business* in Your BOX-OFFICE!

Every wise showman knows that the backbone of his gross is dependent on the volume of children business he does. Children talk about the picture, drag their parents in, and are the greatest movie audience in the world. The MICKEY MOUSE sculptured figure shown on this page, and illustrated as well in the lobby display section of this pressbook, is the official MICKEY MOUSE lobby fixture.

25% discount on each display

Through a special arrangement with United Artists Pictures Corporation we are offering this figure direct to the exhibitors at a saving of 25%—our regular price is $4.00 per display, 25% discount bringing the net price down to $3.00 each.

MICKEY MOUSE relief statuette is a startlingly attractive figure. The pants are red, buttons blue, shoes are orange, gloves a vivid yellow. There is an easel on the back so that you can stand it up in the lobby of your theatre or if desired, you can remove the easel and mount it against the wall.

On the left is shown an actual reproduction of a dealer's window in Norwich, New York, showing how the Norwich Knitting Company's products were displayed in this dealer's window. Featured in the center of the display you can see a MICKEY MOUSE sculptured figure.

Laminite . . .

Exclusive Paper Mache

THIS MICKEY MOUSE figure is made of Laminite (exclusive paper maché), perfected by Old King Cole, Inc. It will stand the onslaughts of rough wear and hard usage. To even further preserve the life of this display it can be varnished so that it can be used in front of your theatre or on the marquee.

Perfect for Merchant Displays . and Dept. Store Windows . . .

Many of the MICKEY MOUSE licencees as well as exhibitors have taken advantage of the smart appearance of this MICKEY MOUSE display. They know it attracts business and dresses windows as well, and is ideal for show rooms and department store window displays as well as for the exhibitors lobby.

Make good use of the coupon on the left. As soon as your order is received we will ship them promptly to you.

Kindly send me F.O.B. Canton
.....Mickey Mouse Displays
at $3.00 each ($4.00 less 25%)

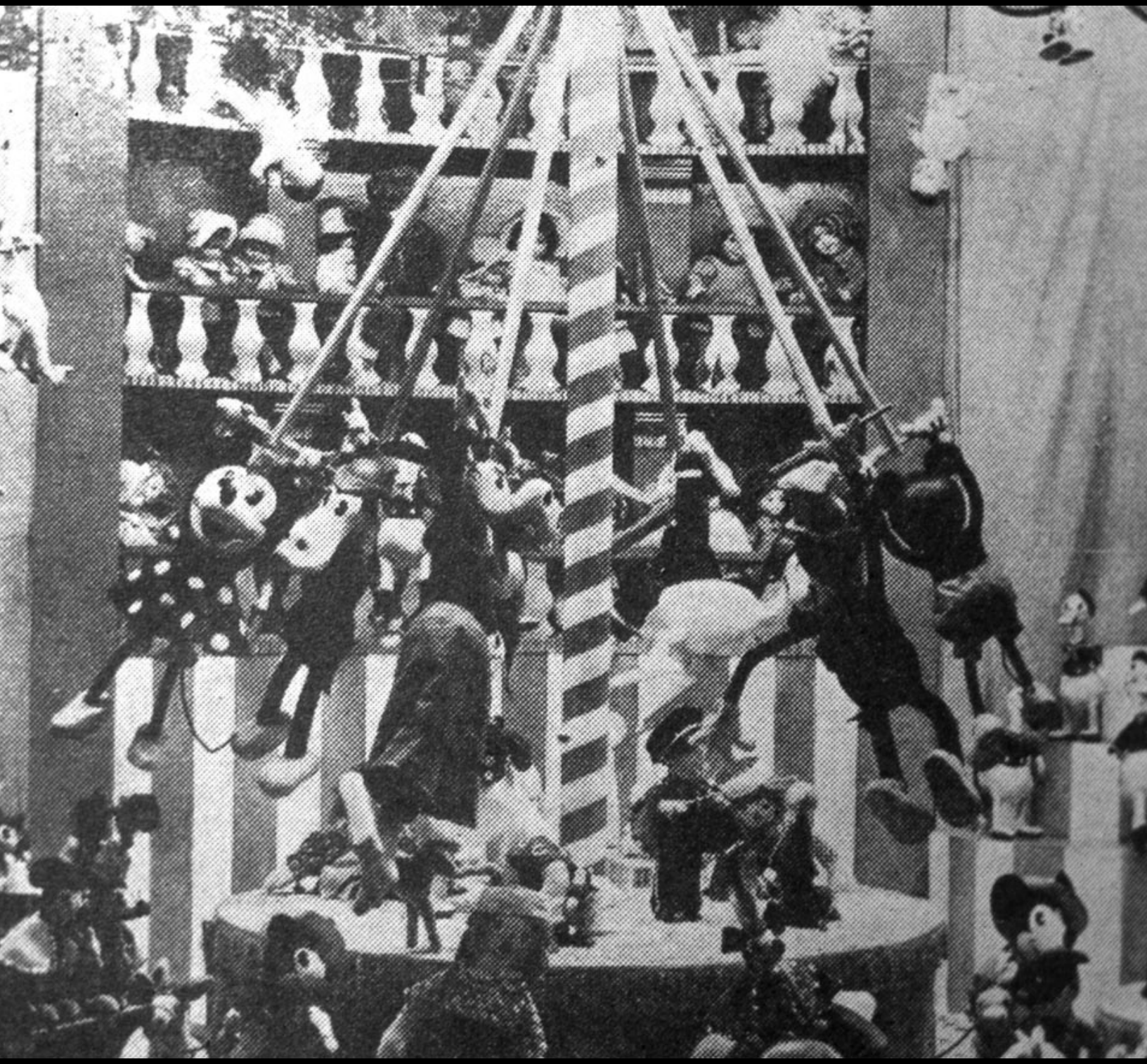
OLD KING COLE, Inc.
Canton - Ohio

And here he stands, one of those early Mickeys. If ever there was a perfect iconic image, one that captures the dynamic excitement of this newly created deity, this is it! There are three of these in Mouse Heaven, give or take a few, depending on how you count : two made in the USA, one made in England that looks the same, and a fourth, made in Germany, before Mickey was "verboten," there. There is, also, one more variation that we will discuss, later. And there are two others that are different, altogether.

Mickey was soon followed by a matching Minnie. And that began the great outpouring of one display piece, after another, depicting all the Disney Characters in an endless variety of forms and poses.

I have thought this out in detail: If I were able to travel back in time to the 1930s, I would have to own a retail store, just so I could order lots of Old King Cole displays. The very thought of this makes my head spin! In the early New York City days, I used to go to the NY Public Library Annex and pour through back issues of "Playthings," and other toy related magazines. With my camera poised on a four legged tripod, I copied many of the images. I, especially, loved photos of stores and store windows from the 1930s. They are truly snapshots, captured through the porthole of a Time Machine. And photographs, like this pair, drove me crazy. Here is an elaborate Old King Cole display of full dimensional animated Disney Characters, presided over by the imposing god-like image of Disney's Santa. He looks like Mighty Zeus, holding court on Mount Olympus, surrounded by Disney Deities, Mickey, playing his cigar box banjo, and Minnie, dancing, Donald, Goofy, the Three Pigs, the Big Bad Wolf, and even Red Riding Hood. This scene appeared in two different stores:

Of all the images I discovered, my favorite was this maypole, with all the early Disney characters, hanging onto it, and spinning around. It is suspended in the very center of the Great Hall downstairs. Many are the times I've seen it there, with my eyes closed, more vivid, in my imagination, than it might be if it were really there. Could this incredible hallucination possibly still exist, somewhere?



These elaborate displays were often made to order, but there were hundreds of stock images, as well; and new designs were added every year. The variations numbered in the hundreds, from simple to elaborate. And even the most basic figures were often available in two versions, standard and animated. And so, on a ledge, atop the Great Wall, there is a line of Old King Cole displays, with Horace and Clarabelle on the ends, and four animated figures, in between them. How did they get there? Therein lies a tale:

I saw my first Old king Cole Displays, Horace Horsecollar and Clarabelle Cow, in Kenny Kneitel's shop, "Fandango," in 1967. When Kenny closed the store, and sold its contents as a total package, he pulled these figures out, and they went to me.

Several years later, my friend, Eliot Sherman, discovered four Old King Cole figures: an animated Mickey and Donald, and still figures of Pluto and Minnie. They were not exactly figures. They were more like bas-reliefs. And he offered them to me for a sum that rhymes with “many” thousand dollars. Huh! My house cost little more than that! But, as my wife might say, in one of her olde English expressions, “There’s more than one way to skin a cat!” So I made a counter offer: If Elliot would lend them to me, I would make two sets of copies, one for him, and one for me. Elliot, who has an unconventional imagination, instantly agreed! And so, I did!

Let’s assess the situation. These images were hand made. As I have always said, and believe, “My hands are as good as anybody’s.” So why not me? I had no need to own the originals. I only wanted to possess the imagery. As an artist, buying them, or making them, was all the same to me. In my eyes, buying imagery and making it are the same thing, but one is instantaneous, and easier than the other, provided that you have the money. If you don’t, you have to do it the hard way. And so, I dove right in, and set to work, earning a Master’s Degree in Old King Cole display.

In the factory, the originals were first made in clay. Then a plaster mold was poured, and glue soaked paper strips were layered into it. The plaster absorbed the moisture. When dry, the final form was painted. I, on the other hand, wanted perfect copies of the images only. I wanted them to capture every nuance, exactly, but at the same time, I wanted something that would, purposely, not pretend to be original, or qualify as forgeries.

So, I made molds of Silastic RTV, which would not harm the originals. No release agent was neccessary. The Silastic captured every minute detail, and every imperfection, as well. The flexible molds were cradled in a plaster nest, to hold them in place. They are still in the basement! And I made the images, themselves, out of fiberglass. These will outlast the originals by centuries. I painted them to match, including every chip and flake in the original paint. Then, I cut acetate masks, and airbrushed in the names. You’d have to know me to believe me, but you can trust me, when I say that, from the front, it was absolutely impossible to tell the difference. When Elliot came to pick them up, we played that game. The copies I made won!

As an added self-incentive, I animated my version of Minnie and Pluto, and motorized all four of them. Here is a really bad Polaroid of all of them, together, on the front porch, with yours truly in the middle. Can you tell which ones are fake? Hint: The fatty on the upper step is really me.

I then introduced Elliot to Maurice Sendak, who bought the originals. Elliot sold the copies to a collector in Staten Island, who later, resold them. Mickey and Donald are now owned by John Fawcett, on display in his museum in Maine. Minnie and Pluto changed hands several times. I forget who has them now. The question is: Are these insanely inspired re-creactions "works of art" or merely "fakes"? In some ways, they are more amazing than "the real thing!" How different are they, from Andy Warhol's Brillo Box? The difference is: 1. I am not Andy Warhol. 2. He wouldn't have the skill to do it. So here they are, one at a time, the four I made. I photographed them, while standing on a ladder. This simple form of animation attempts to emulate their action:

PLUTO
By Special Permission
Walt Disney Enterprises

©Walt Disney Enterprises

Over the years, I have acquired more of the "real thing", the iconic first Mickey and Minnie, in three versions, one set of which, came from England. Those are located in the big showcase “In the Hall”.

Atop the tall tower, is a running animated Mickey, with his original paint. I have not touched up a thing. I discovered this at Renningers Extravaganza, many years ago, for one hundred dollars. Compared to what Elliot was asking for the ones he sold Maurice, I could have 200 of these. This Mickey is quite different, in color, from the repainted one that was sold at auction, recently. Old King Cole was not into color variations; all their Mickeys and Minnies, without exception, had yellow gloves. And Mickey’s red pants always had blue or yellow buttons. Even the foreign versions continued the same colors.

Speaking of foreign versions, this is what the Micky Maus display looked like in Germany. He is quite accurately pictured in this 1933 German ad.

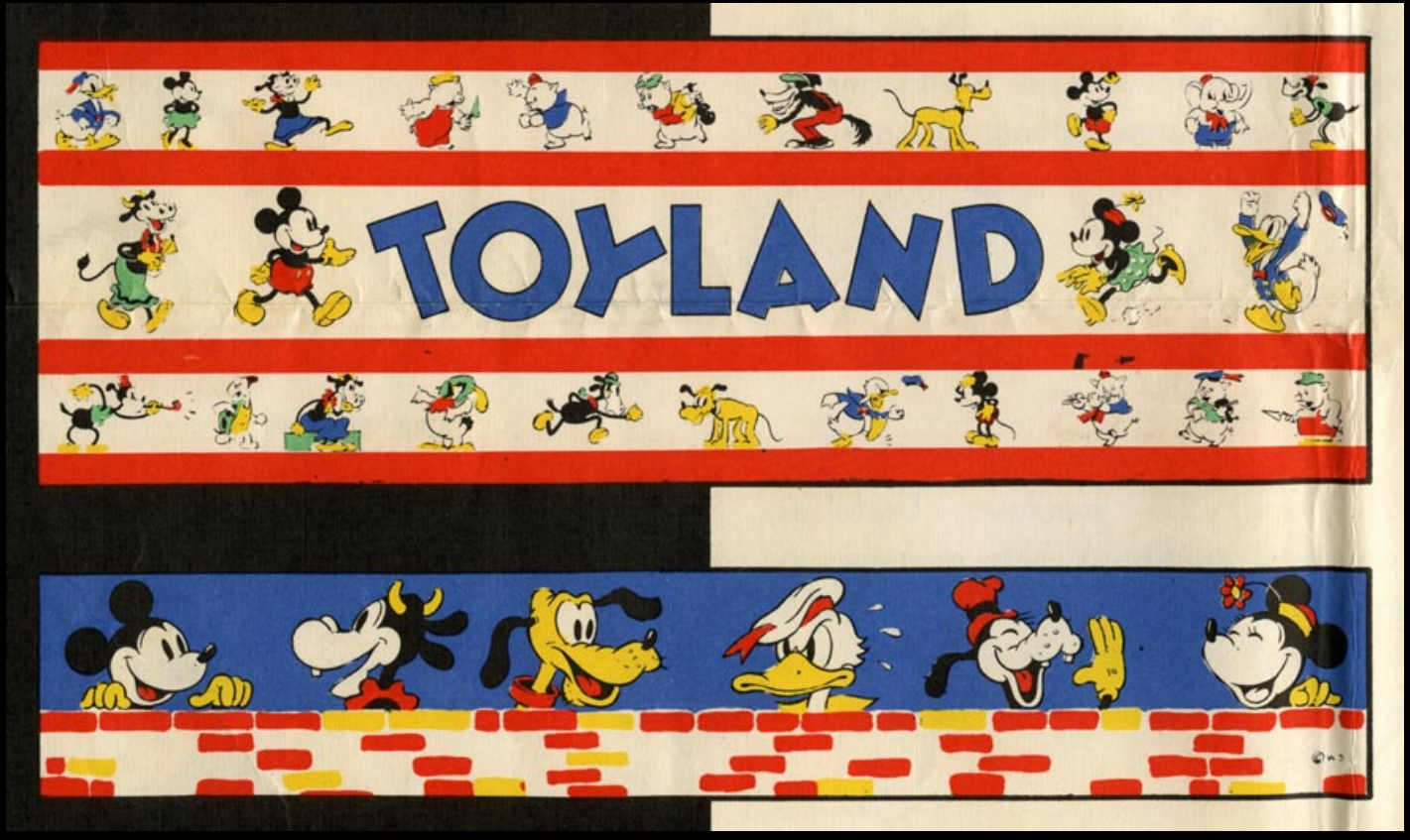
WIR FABRIZIEREN MIT GENEHMIGUNG DES ERFINDERS:
MICKY-MAUS
-MASKEN
-NASEN
-AUFSETZ-KÖPFE
-KOSTÜME
HEINTZ & KÜHN
MANEBACH i. THÜR. (16)
ZUR MESSE IN LEIPZIG: „PETERSHOF", IV. ETG., Z. 437-39
VOTRE BON GOÛT & VOTRE INTERET
y seront satisfaits

Each year, Old king Cole, not only, added new characters, they also added new variations on the Images they already had. Here are a handsome pair of figures that stand on either side of the subwoofer. They represent Mickey and Donald, updated by a year. I really got carried away, trying to photograph these two figures. I placed them on either side of the Mickey and Minnie's trunk, which is where they stand all the time. Before I realized it, I had created an extravaganza, one too good not to capture on film. So recorded the entire scene. Floating on a cloud, in Mouse Heaven.

And, then, to give each of the two figures their due, I shot a photo, featuring each one. Of course, I couldn't resist including all the other stuff, as well.

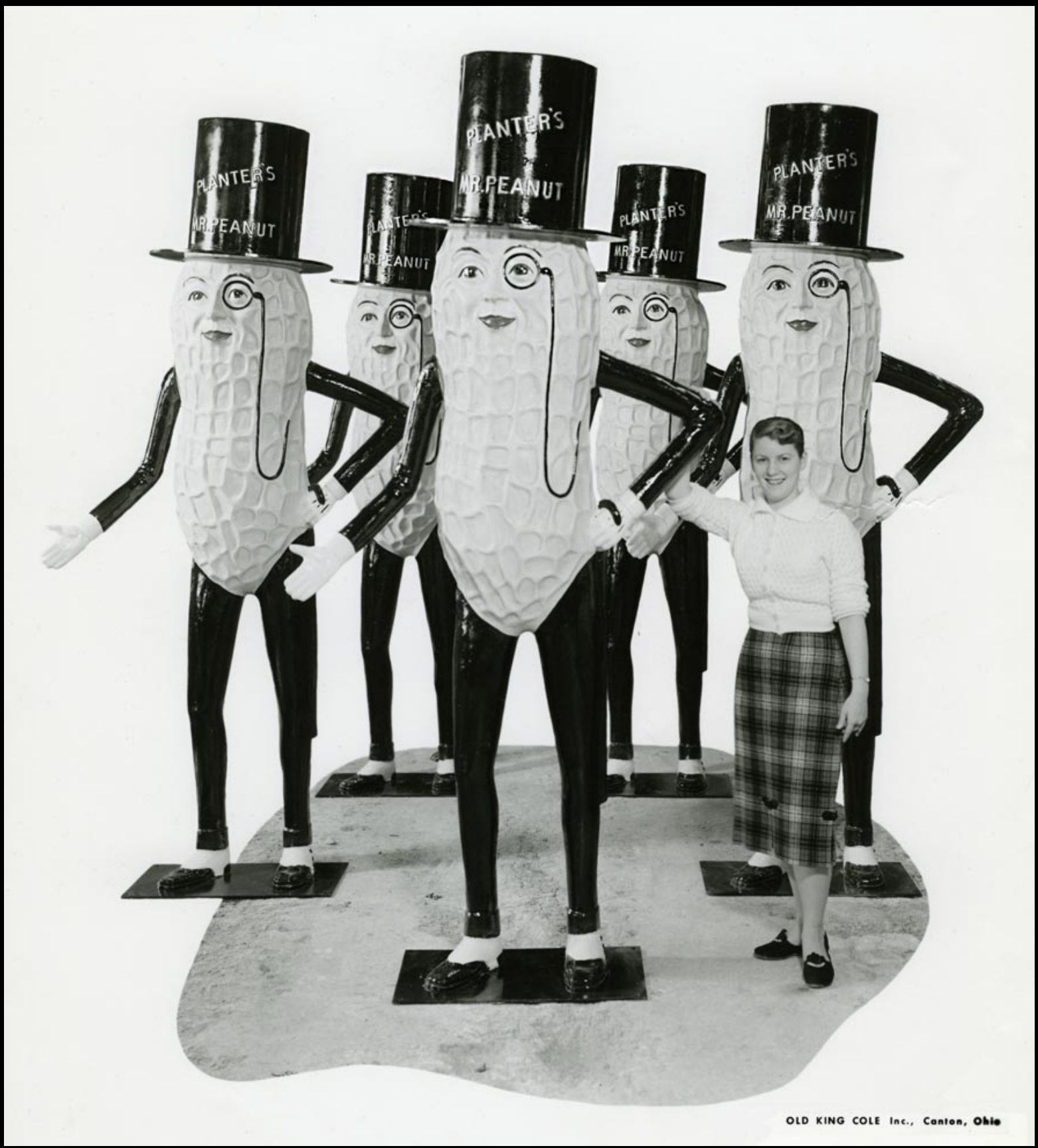
FELIX
Excelsior Hotel Ernst
KÖLN

There is a related item that should be included here. In the mid 1930s, Old King Cole teamed up with W. L. Stensgaard & Associates Inc. to produce a folder that folds out to three foot wide, advertising their mutual products, as a means of decorating a store for Christmas time. Stensgaard made printed murals, by a process they called, "Comura." We would call it "silk screen." The folder, which is too big to reproduce, shows several of these. I'll scan a small section of it, here. These banners were intended to be used, along with Old king Cole displays.



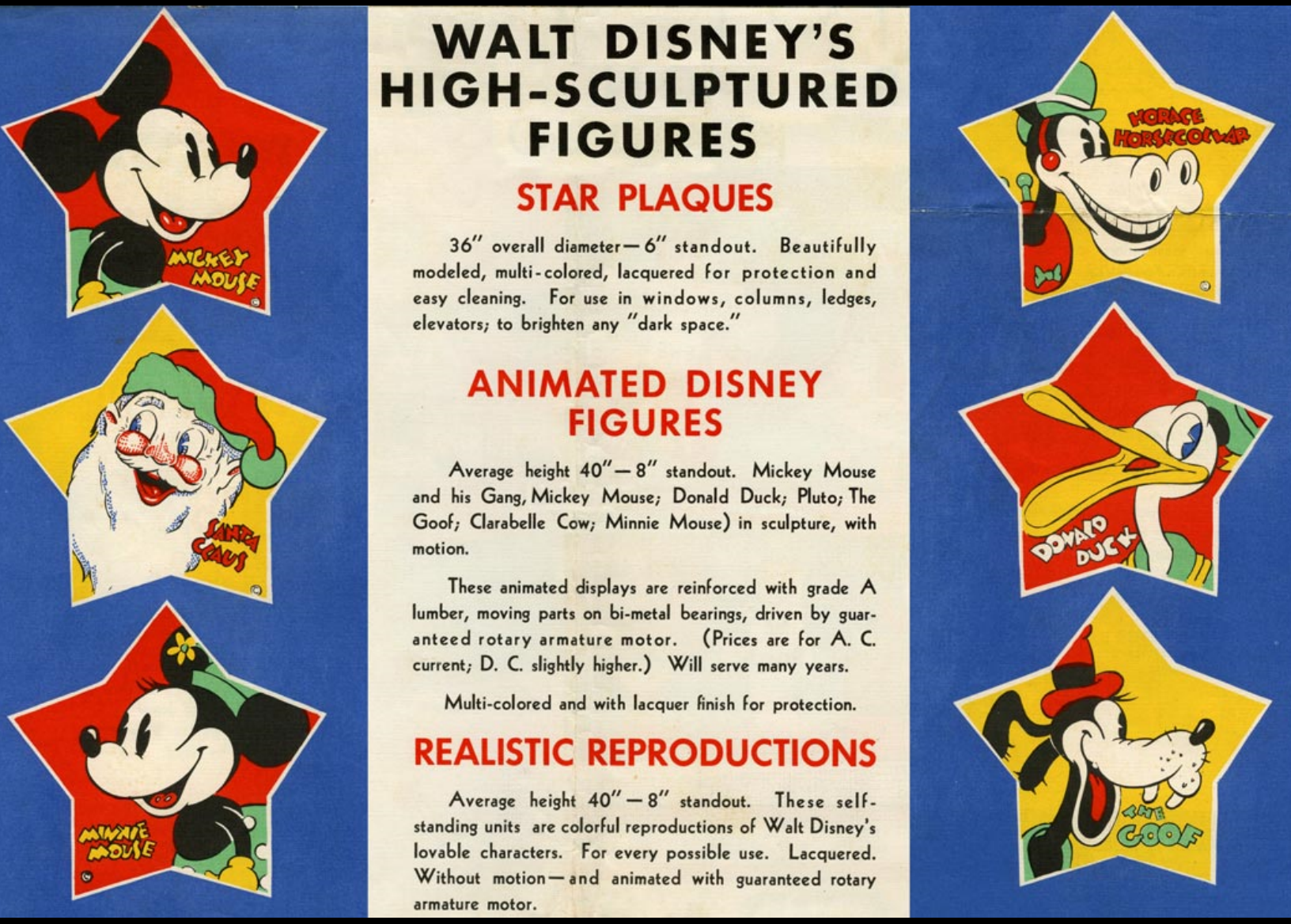
The lower of two, shown in the folder, hangs high up on a wall overlooking Mouse Heaven. It is 90” long, and was a bitch to frame.

My friend, Al Horen, made a pilgrimage to the Old King Cole Papier Mache Company, in Canton, Ohio, in the 1970s. In their warehouse, they still had Mr. Peanut figures eight feet tall, and a giant image of Superman, holding up the ceiling. They would not sell Al anything! But they did let him have this photo. They explained that he had to get permission from the licensor. Al wrote to Planters, without success. Sadly, several years later, the place burnt to the ground, and all the treasures that it held were lost forever.



The shining star, among my modest array of Old King Cole displays, is this Mickey Star. It represents the culmination of a trade with Maurice Sendak that was in the negotiation stage for, at least, twenty years. Compared to the Mickey and Minnie carousel figures, you can see that it is big!

The Stensgaard, Old King Cole Catalogue Folder pictures the entire mind boggling line of stars. There were six in all. So far, the lone star to appear, is the Mickey that you see, above.



The ins and outs of the trade deals that were made, and then retracted by Maurice, were never ending. Maurice was obsessed with the Mickey Mouse Waddle Book. I traded him one, complete, but punched out, nearly 40 years ago, in exchange for, of all things, the spiral staircase that I waddle to and from work on, every day. My second Waddle Book was pristine mint, unpunched. I offered it to him, my only one, in exchange for original art. He even agreed to let me suggest the subject matter. It was to be called "The Art of Maurice Sendak," and would be a kind of compendium of his most famous characters. I also suggested that he should publish it, to reap the financial rewards of that, and then, give me the art. He actually, did, exactly, that! He did the drawing, and his publisher issued it as a special edition, including it in a fancy gift set. Then, Maurice "fell in love with it," and "couldn't part with it." He vowed he would make me another. But never did! Later, with profuse apologies, he sold the drawing to somebody, for a lot of money. In the end, neither of us knowing how near the end might be, I gave him the Waddle Book, anyway, in exchange, for which, he traded me the star. Both the book and the star were intended to be symbolic of, yet, a bigger trade, promised to take place, posthumously. I took it seriously. He did not. At any rate, I guess, all along, we knew it was a game, merely a pipe dream, designed to dull the cutting edge of destiny.

So here it is, “The STAR,” shining high up on the wall, overlooking Mouse Heaven. It is an image packed with reverie and poignancy that means much more to me than the eye can see.

And here is the final photo, the last time Maurice visited Mouse Heaven, just as he was leaving, following the Great Waddle Book Trade that took so many years to consummate. It was a most memorable day. The photo shows Eunice, Maurice, and me, and the cat, Smoochie. Now, only two of us remain.

BIBENDUM

Early on, while still living on 28th Street, I discovered another Object Trouvé, at a furniture store a block away, a perfect sculpture, a Readymade! I moseyed by the shop, one day, looking for a round wood table with lions feet. The store specialized in these. Trucks pulled up each weekend, and unloaded tons of them, all, whether plain or fancy, were $45 each. And there IT was, a stunning electric tire pump! The owner was sort of into these. He had picked it up in France. The price was thirty bucks. Astride it, was Bibendum, the Michelin Tire Man. This object, simply, had everything! Like Mickey, Bibendum's multi-layered body, made up of entirely of tires, was pure abstraction. His small and perfectly formed human hands presented just the right note of reality, gesticulating with a flourish, as he held the hose up to his mouth, prepared to inflate tires. The object had weight and substance, cast iron, and an interesting patina, the signs of age and the chipped paint were just right. They told a story that being mint could never relate. The tire gauge, with its delicate graphics and yellowing celluloid lens, was like a jewel. I fell in love with this eye opening object, at first sight, and lugged it home, giddy with delight! If not for it, weighing me down, I might have taken flight.

And so, Bibendum, “Bib,” the Michelin Tire Man, became, in a single day, an object I would seek and respond to, always. Back then, in 1968, Bib's past was still present, and great images of him could still be found. And I discovered that he had a history that was much better than his future. At one time, in France there had been whole Michelin Parades, with massive floats, and images of Bib, inflated, many stories high.

In 1968 there were still great images of Bibendum to be discovered, although, most were imported. That is not to say he didn’t, also, have a legacy, here, in the USA. One of the best examples of that is this massive plaster statue that I discovered one May morning, in Brimfield’s earliest days. Minutes into the unpacking, with few vehicles in place, I spied a monumental statue of Bibendum, emerging from an isolated station wagon, several thousand feet away. I flew across the still nearly empty field, dodging moving vehicles on the way, and captured it, before it could escape. What a wonderful way to start a day of high adventure. Fueled by pure adrenalin, I carried the massive, yet fragile, plaster figure, across the field, and deposited it in the safe haven of my station wagon.

HELIN TIRES

Auction Acres, was just a one day show, back then, but what a day it was! Those glorious 12 hours proved long enough to hold a lifetime of adventure, intense excitement, and intoxicating pleasure. And when the day was over, both my money and my energy were spent. But, ah! My vehicle was overflowing, brimful of Brimfield treasure. And this exhilarating event, this best Christmas morning ever, took place three times a year. With each passing season, it grew bigger and better, and we allowed ourselves to believe that this tri-annual source of predictable nirvana would go on, year after year, forever.

Over the years I obtained a few more interesting Bibs, but never another as spectacular as this. Unfortunately, the Michelin Man, when seen at all, was still evolving visually, and not for the better. Of course, I would say the same of Mickey. And, in a way, they are very similar. Both are pure abstractions, made up of geometric shapes. And, like Mickey, Bib's best days are behind him, maybe.

In the years that followed, Bib's popularity waned. But, now, thanks to computer animation, he is coming back again, radically changed, and yet, the styling, really, isn't bad. Although, his origin as a stack of tires has been lost in translation. In fact, I could swear he's morphed into a Teenaged Mutant NinjaTurtle.

And as his styling became more "up to date" my interest in him began to fade. But I still managed to find a few vintage things. This large latex figure, for one. He was designed to sit atop a truck. Similar images are still made, today, but they are not the same. More recent versions are stiff, slick, and robotic, molded out of glossy plastic. This guy, on the other hand, is warm and friendly, with a great big winning smile, and a twinkle in his curiously configured pie-cut eyes. He appears to be enjoying the performance of the attractive young lady, whose image is reflected in the frame. I swear I didn't set this up! It is pure accident! I didn't notice it, until I blew the photo up. Nor would you, if I didn't point it out! Mickey seems slightly verklempt. "What's she doing in my cel?"

MICHELIN

I have seen only one modern piece that I had any desire to obtain. it sits on my desk, today, to hold my better brushes.

Here is an almost great object, a solid heavy rubber toy, and its original box. The box, roughly translated, reads, “Merry Christmas! Bibendum interrupts this Michelin commercial to offer this "Babybib" to your small children.” On his chest it says, “No too small tires allowed!” In his hand he holds an object that is impossible to identify! An updated vinyl version is on the right.

At one time, Bakelite ashtrays like this one were all over the house. Alas, I used them. The seated image of Bibendum is actually quite nice. One, occasionally, sees fake hood ornaments cast from these. Putting these three together, I noticed that one is higher quality. Looking closer I discovered that the better, crisper one, in the center, was made in England, the

Speaking of Radiat here is a real one.

Another interesting novelty is this Bibendum jumping Jack

High in the rafters, is a rather nice tin sign. The image of Bib captures him in his prime, straight forward and iconic. I believe that this, too, comes from France.

Likewise, is this tire repair first aid kit, everything one needs to administer care to ailing tires and punctured inner tubes.

And here is the companion piece to the small tire pump, with which my interest in the Michelin Tire Man began. It too was imported from France, As an object it is, somewhat, more industrial than sculptural, but, nonetheless, it has a certain complex charm. And the large figure of Bibendum is, once again, made of cast iron.

And then there are the posters! I have been presented with the opportunity to own them all, over the years, but three, in particular, attracted me. The first, sort of just came my way at a local auction. Here we see Bibendum, riding a bicycle. This is so delightfully surreal! He is removing parts of his anatomy, the spare tires from around his waist, (would that I could do the same), and sailing them at the viewer, one at a time. I love the totally surreal way the upper half of him continues to float in space.

LE MEILLEUR - LE MOINS CHER

PNEU VÉLO MICHELIN

E. CHEREAU

129, Rue de Rennes. NANTES

IMP. CHAIX - PARIS - 8 12 (ENCRES LORILLEUX)
1449 - 8 - 12110

This second poster is printed on some sort of glossy medium that I was warned was years ahead of its time in vibrancy, but is highly vulnerable to light. So, it is kept in a dark hallway. In fact, on the bottom of the poster, in rather large type, it reads, in French: “This poster is to be displayed in interiors only!” The art is most fanciful. Bib is riding a bicycle, through fields of broken glass, with Pierette, clinging to his back, lovingly. She waves "Adieu" to poor Pierrot, who, in hot pursuit of his fleeing lover, is tumbling off his bike. The possibility that it is not equipped with Michelin tires is implied. The Man in the Moon looks down on this dramatic scene, and smiles.

And last of all, is a poster I once saw pictured, thumbnail size, in an ad brochure, years ago. And for many years, thereafter, I asked every poster dealer I encountered, if they knew it, or could get it for me. Finally, after years of inquiry, one poster specialist, who came from France to Atlantic City, annualy, got it for me. This Poster is amazing! It foretells the imagery of King Kong and Fay Wray, a quarter century before the film was made. A giant Bib, leering, in the background, and puffing on his cigar, holds a luscious Art Neuveau lady in his enormous hand, as she caresses a "Pnew Michelin."

PINOCCHIO

Can anyone, born recently, even imagine a World, without cell phones, computers, and TV? Could they possibly conceive of reaching the age of three, without ever seeing a moving image? I remember my first movie, vividly. I remember how it felt, how deeply it affected me. The year was 1940. It spoke to me on levels so primitive that they were practically primordial. My tiny psyche had not yet evolved into what one might call rational. After all, I was only three years old. The total experience of the movie grabbed me in the very fiber of my being, and some might say, never let go. Little did my parents suspect, or ever realize, that the simple act of taking their kid to his first movie was going to shape the course of his entire life.

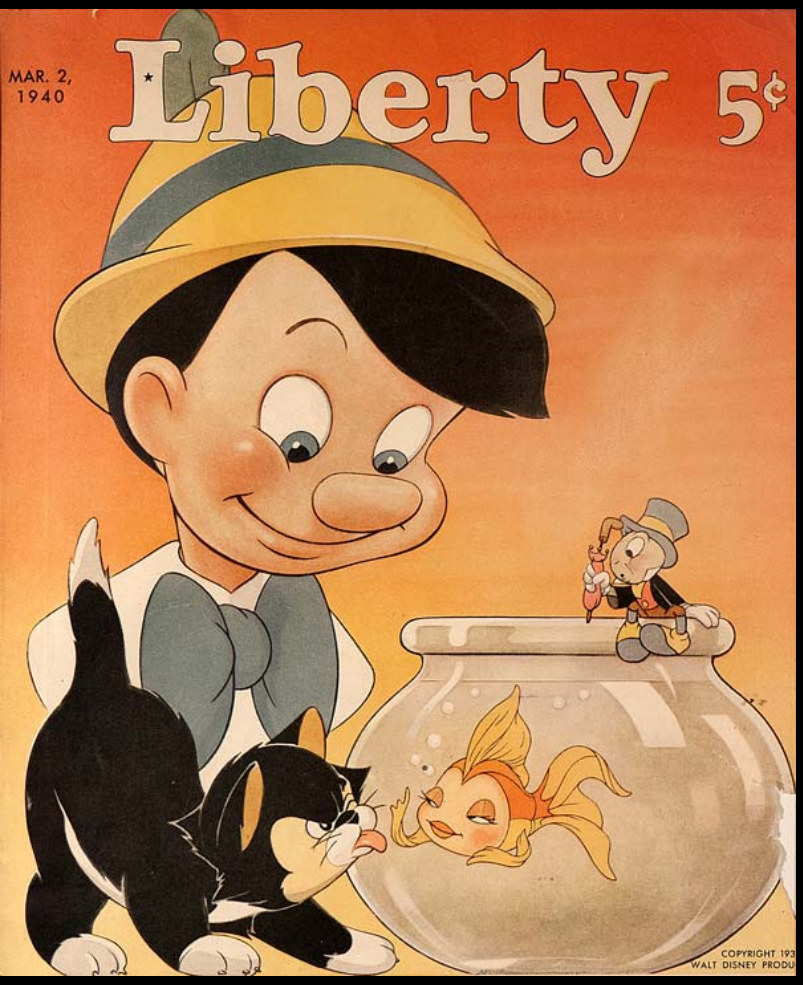
The film, of course, was Pinocchio. Pinocchio was, also, the first word I learned to spell. I just liked the melody of how the letters sound. Typing it, just now, still gives me a little thrill.

I can still recall the intricate thought processes of trying to figure out what I was seeing. I innocently believed that the world that was visible, through that enormous window, was unquestionably real. I perceived it as an open doorway, inviting me into a deliriously delicious world that was far more attractive than the hum drum one, around me, which I, eventually, came to learn was referred to as, "reality." Thus, due to those 90 magic minutes in a darkened theater, I became a true believer, and set my sights on, one day, living in the Wonderful World of Disney.

I never knew a living soul who collected Pinocchio. And none of the Pinocchio artifacts I collected, quite captured the Magic of the movie, and yet I acquired them, because they were there, all part of the doctrine, like attending services on Sunday, when one might rather be elsewhere.

I do know that I loved the styling of the character. Pinocchio, himself, is the perfect combination of reality and fantasy, developed to a point of delicate perfection. The drawing on the cover of this magazine says it all, the exquisite essence of appealing!

A revelation just occurred to me: That look, that face, it has always remained in the corners of my mind. I must have been channeling it, unconsciously, when I did a line of Dolls called, “Friendz and Family” that became “The Play Along Club”, about 10 years ago. I had become tired of trying to second guess, and please everybody in the toy industry, and decided to simply make the best doll that I could. Looking at Betty Brown (Olivia), now, I realize she was the "sister" of Pinocchio, only with a smaller nose. In a sense, the elusive essence of the life force in Pinocchio is more "alive" in her than many of the toys, below.



Perhaps, it was the abstract styling of his nose that made Pinocchio unique. I’d be lying if I said the message that it conveyed, about falsehood and honesty, appealed to me. And, at three, and, again, when I was 10, its Freudian overtones eluded me. But I do know that when Pinocchio became a real boy, and the nose had to go, I saw it as a tragedy. Suddenly, his comic aspect sank into the mire of cutesy mediocrity. This, so called, happy ending was nearly as gut wrenching as Bambi’s mother dying! I wished he was a puppet again. And he did, in fact, become one, for the sake of merchandising. No one wanted a doll of Pinocchio, the “Real Boy!” But Dolls of Pinocchio “before” were produced in profusion. A pretty much definitive sampling of them fills the showcase, below.

The best of them, naturally, were produced by Joseph Kallus, for Ideal Toys. They came in three sizes, the biggest being that large doll in the middle. In the far left corner at the back, is a Marx toy called, The Pinocchio Acrobat. Next to that, is a rather handsome large doll from France that walks mechanically. Then, the big Ideal Pinocchio, and, next, a curious doll by Krueger that is part fabric, and part wood. The next row down, are three ideal medium sized dolls, one, on the right, with the box, and in the center, the largest Pinocchio by Knickerbocker, the only company that challenged Joseph Kallus in the composition Doll category. Here, too, is a Knickerbacker Jiminy, fully sculpted. This won a blue ribbon, which, ironically, resembles the one he was given by the Blue Fairy. At the far right, is a Pinocchio figurine that I got when I was six. He has had a tough life, but is still here. Along the way, he lost his head, but it is attached again.

The "Ideal" Pinocchio dolls fulfill an unresolved desire for me. As a kid, one could not purchase one of these with money, as I never saw them in any store. Rather, I remember them, in profusion, as carnival prizes, adorning booths that tested one's luck and skills, at carnivals and amusement parks, galore. I can visualize them, to this day, hanging there in rows, long after the movie had come and gone, all hopelessly unavailable to me. The only carnival prize that I could win, and by the way, always did, was at the booth called "Guess your Weight". My bedroom was adorned with glittering plaster effigies of Superman and Donald Duck, all prizes I had won, for being unfathomably fat. But never a Pinocchio.

This angle highlights a group of items that were made in Italy. The fact that they appeared in the Kay Kamen Catalogue as Official Pinocchio Merchandise in 1940 is confusing, a curious spin on marketing. They represent the traditional image of Pinocchio as illustrated by Atillio Mussino for the original story by Collodi. Munsey offers this photo from the 1940 Catalogue, stating that the toys “are designed after the Disney character of Pinocchio.” That , of course, is not so.

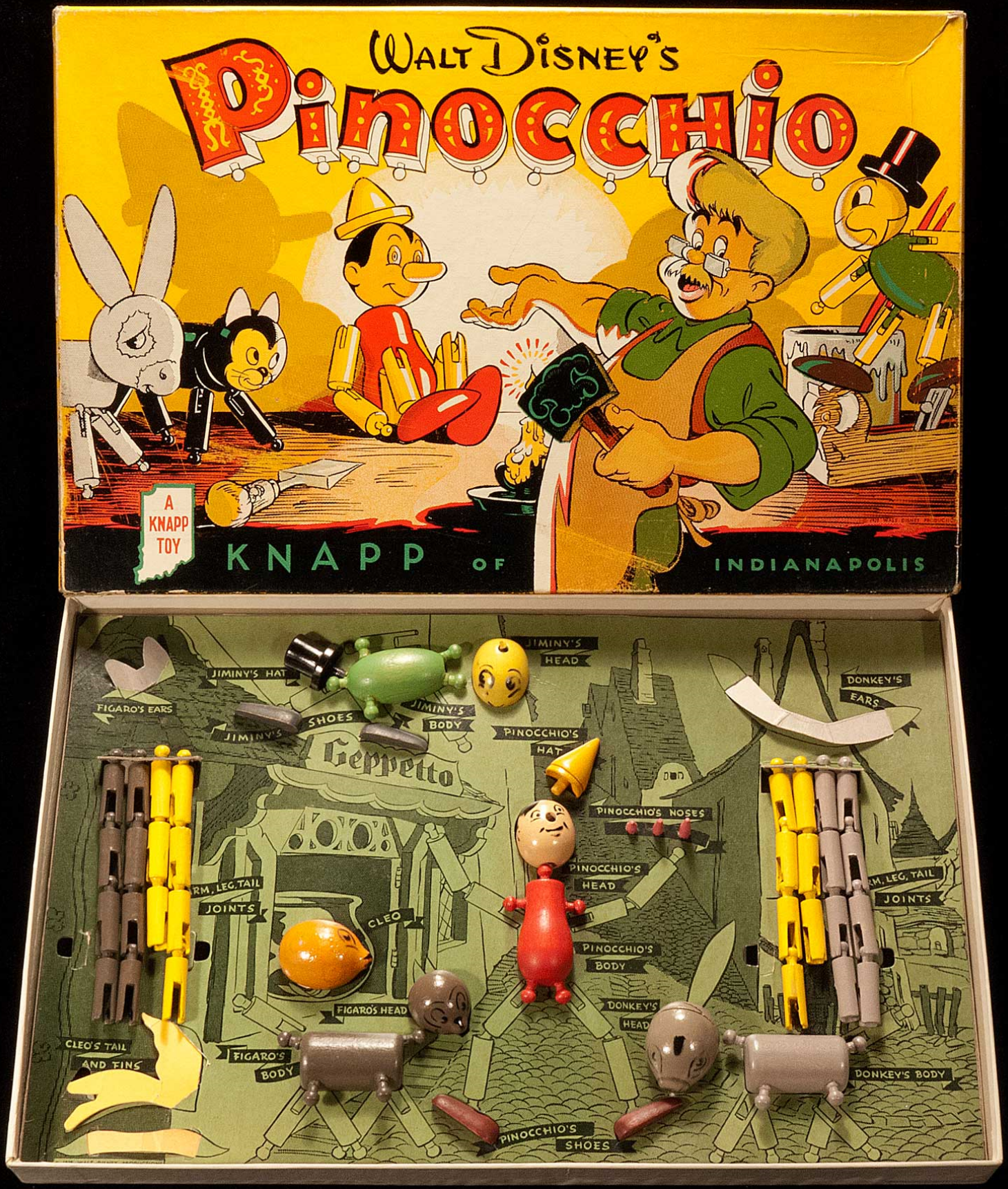
Handmade figures (1940) by the Bert B. Barry Furniture Mart of Chicago, Illinois. All are designed after the Disney character of Pinocchio.

They are here, in Mouse Heaven, because I like the image, especially, the strangely stylized Pinocchio on a windup bike from “Ignap” of Italy. It predates the Disney movie by 15 years, at least. Collodi's Pinocchio is to Italy what Don Quixote is to Spain, or Peter Pan is to England, a fictional entity that has come to embody the spirit and essence of its native country.

Here is a very pleasant image of the classic Pinocchio, along with some objects from a former lifetime, a World I lived in, long ago.

The toy, below, is a personal favorite. This is one wild and crazy plaything. Look at the way the contents are packaged. Every single little piece has its own place in the complexly illustrated platform. It is a Miracle that the toy could be shipped and arrive in tact. And, yet, it did, 72 years later, every piece is still in place. Would that I could say the same! And the cover art was actually created for the toy. It subtly bridges the gap between the ugliness of the contents, and the delicious art of Disney. This toy bears a strange affinity to Colorforms, where I toiled for 20 years to earn the funds to collect all this stuff. We had the same dilemma there, romancing the basic ugliness of the barely bearable plastic pieces with every bit of visual trickery that we could muster up.

There is some amazing virtuosity, going on here, as the creator of this package piles on one nuance after another, in an attempt to make the crude wooden pieces, inside, look appealing and consistent with the delicious World of Disney. Check out the plugs on the letters of Pinocchio! Nice touch! I admire the simplicity, with which, using just a few flat colors, the artist managed to make the cover appear to literally glow. And the strange color scheme, made up of limited and unattractive colors, that, somehow, succeeds in looking beautiful.



Just, contemplate the intense labor, involved in simply packaging this toy! What kind of work force did it take to put each piece in place? This wasn't made in some country where labor was two cents an hour. This was made in Indianapolis, in the heart of the USA, in the days when there was no such thing as jobs Americans wouldn't take, and everyone was proud to earn a living wage. Oh, would you believe Pinocchio's noses, three of different lengths, all neatly set in place, in the complex platform that offers up a heavy dose of magic, and, at the same time, serves as the instruction sheet? This is a toy designers pleasant dream, of making a silk purse out of a donkey's ear, a toy maker's toy, indeed!

Finally, to fill out what would, otherwise, be a very short page, I'll add some cels. I never collected cels, agressively, especially when they started to become expensive. But, in the early days, a few cels fell my way. I was playing the game of Monopoly, the easy way, the version, in which the properties are distributed, like dealing out a deck of cards. And so Fate arbitrarily shuffeled a few cels to me.

The first of these, is a Jiminy Cricket cel, sold by Courvoisier Gallery. The background is an airbrush painting, made specifically for each cel, a silhouette of the figure had to be cut out, to serve as a mask to spray the background shadow. On the back of each framed cel was a label. It told the story of what these cels were all about. Disney felt that to create some vestige of value for these handpicked few, they had to destroy all the others.

There is a signature on the mat, God knows who actually wrote that! Amazing! From what I have been able to learn, just now, searching the internet, that signature is, most likely, real! Disney's signature changed, over the years but that flourish remained largely unchanged. And "he tended to "print" his name on matted cels!"

And there are three more cels from Pinocchio. They came to me in a roundabout way, via France. The first is a lovely image of Cleo, enveloped in a halo of bubbles.

And here is Jiminy in a bottle, out to sea. The water ripples etc., were all seen in the movie.

The last cell is called a “set up.” It is oversized, complete, and incredibly complex. Everything, the water, the waves and white caps, gulls in the sky, wind in the sail, and the raft with characters, are each on different levels, separate sheets of celluloid. The art and mechanics of animation could hardly get more spectacular than this.

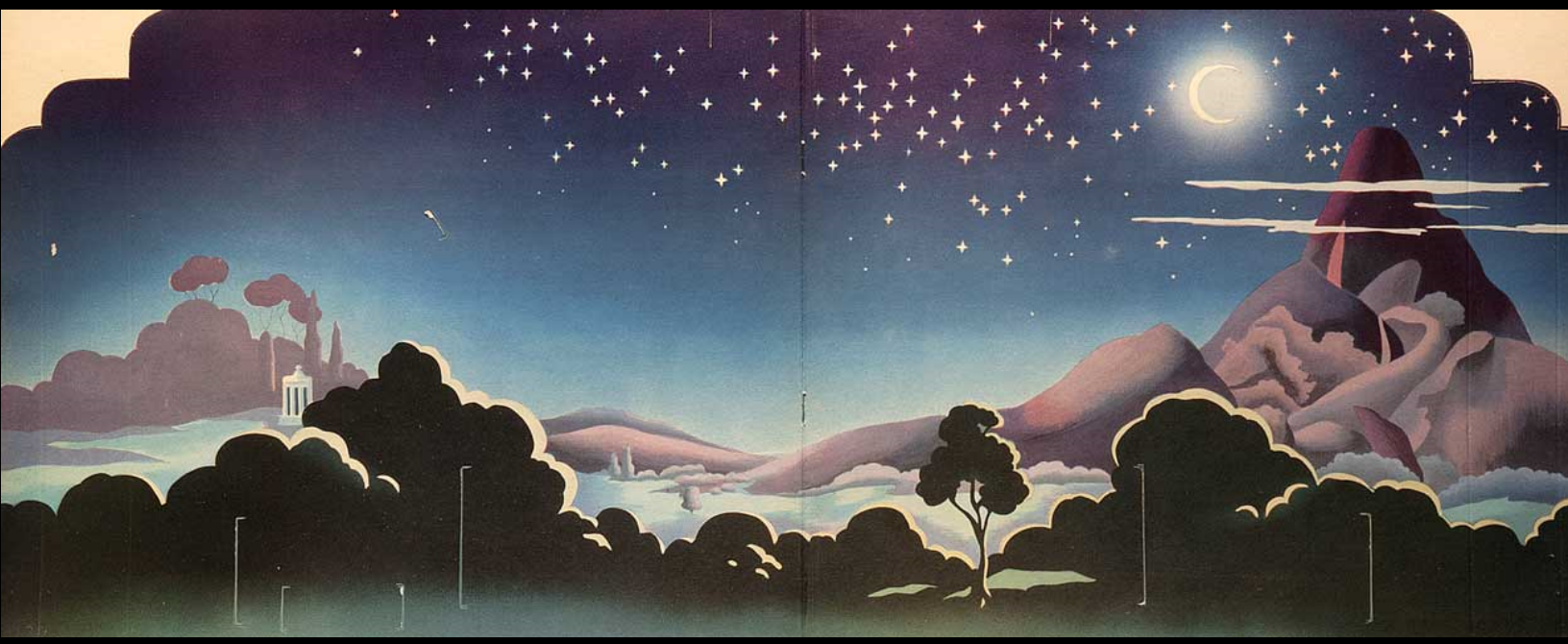
This is the pinnacle of Animation! Could anyone, including Disney, outdo it? The answer is, YES! Coming up next: FANTASIA!

FANTASIA

In the eyes of many, myself included, Fantasia was the pinnacle of Disney animation. It is a miracle that this film ever happened. It was certainly not for the kiddies, and generated no toy products, whatsoever, with one notable exception, “The Fantasia Cut-out Book.” As someone who protests that nostalgia plays no role in his collection, I stand corrected! I have to make an exception for this item. It was, quite possibly, the cardboard key that, ultimately, unlocked the world of great music to me. And if I was to ever manage to step through that elusive silver screen, to live in the enchanted World of Disney, the Mythological countryside, portrayed in Disney’s vision of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, is where I’d choose to be. This elysian paradise was amazingly well represented in one of the most wonderful things I ever got my little hands on, for a dime, the Fantasia Cut-out Book.

The year had to be 1940. I was three; too young to punch out the images, on my own, so my parents helped me. It was called a Cut-out Book, but the images were perforated to be be punched out. And, in my exuberance, I tore the head off the tiny black centaurette, trying to extract her from the page. I cried and cried, traumatized by sadness and shame. I never forgave myself for that act of ineptitude; even now, I still regret it. Ironically, that tiny figure is the one that makes the book desirable to some, today, because she is now seen as politically incorrect, and was completely excised from the film. Being pictured in the Cut-out Book, gratuitously eating a piece of watermelon, added insult to injury. But she’s gone, now, and the music didn’t even miss a beat. The fact that some at Disney try to deny that she was ever there, makes this evidence, in the form of a Whitman Cut-out Book, even more rare.

The most wonderful part of the Fantasia Cut-out Book is its beautiful background, with the mythological countryside of "Beethoven's 6th", and a Maxfield Parrish-like blue sky.



Zeus himself, King of the Gods, peers over a fluffy cloud. Stars twinkle in the cardboard sky. I still have one, today, a Fantasia Punch-out Book, exactly like that first one, all set up and complete in a showcase of its own, downstairs. It is one of the few things from my childhood that still holds magic for me now.

Looking at the book, before it is punched out, it would hardly lead one to believe that true magic hides inside.

950

WALT DISNEY'S FANTASIA

CUT-OUT BOOK

COMPLETE PANORAMA OF FAMOUS CHARACTERS FROM THE WALT DISNEY PRODUCTION

Authorized Edition

SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON INSIDE FRONT COVER

BEN ALI GATOR

UNICORN

MLLE. UPANOVA

BACCHUS AND JACCHUS

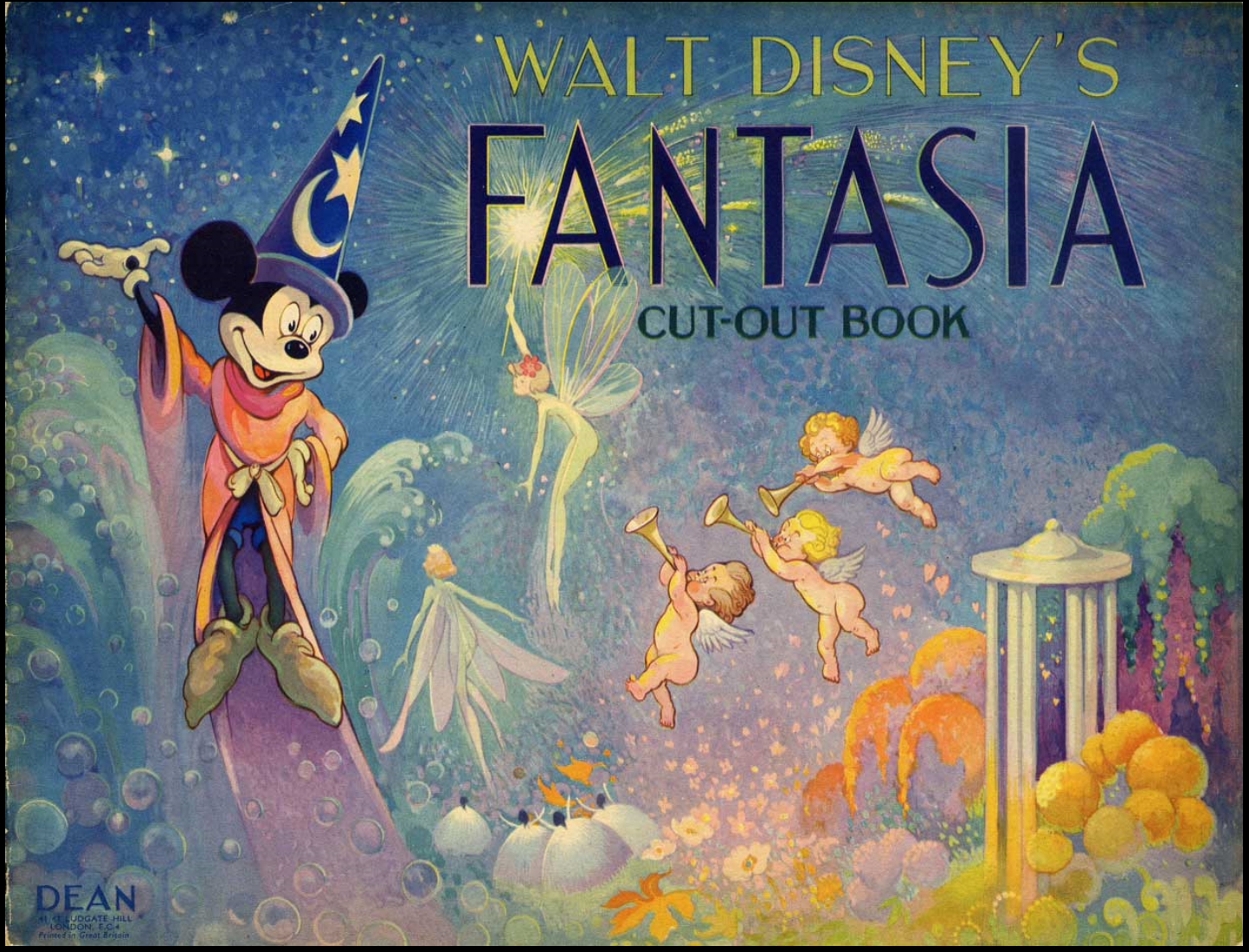
HYACINTH HIPPO

FAUN AND FAIRIES

ELEPHANT DANCER

But punched out, and put together, carefully following the diagram, the results are are Wonderful. The artist who created this completely "Got It!" The entire scene is composed as a perfect whole. It wasn't me, who set this up. I followed the artist's carefully drawn out instructions, to the letter. What you see is, exactly, what he intended it to be. From the placement of the moon, the sweep of the elephants trunk with the pink balloon, to the slant of Mickey's broom, everything in this complex scene exists in perfect harmony.

There was an English version of a Fantasia Cut-Out Book, as well. This one, published by Deans Rag Book Company was intended to be "cut out". It is perhaps as beautiful as the Whitman one, in its own way, but completely different in feel and effect. It pushes its interpretation into areas of romanticized mythology that are hardly Disney-like. The art says more about the person, who drew it than it does about the movie. Nonetheless, there is a certain magic to it, a kind of candy colored beauty that is suggested by the cover. It presents the viewer with a whimsical scenario that was never in the film, but is intriguing, as Mickey floats through a kind of Fairyland.



I got this book, many years ago, and, although, it was complete, it had been partially cut out. Whoever undertook the task never finished it. What they did accomplish wasn't bad, but even the carefully cut out figures were never scored and folded. It seems like they just stopped mid-stream. All these years, I have considered completing it. But the background scene is on the reverse of the cover, so to do so would destroy the cover art, on the other side.

I recently obtained a second copy, uncut. And, once again, I'm tempted, and still dying to give it a try. I just realized that I could actually finish cutting the few remaining pieces of the first copy, which would actually improve them. And, then, with the aid of the computer, trim the excess away from the background, "visually" by using Photoshop, and nothing would be harmed! Thus, we could actually see what this set looks like assembled for the first time in, possibly, half a century.

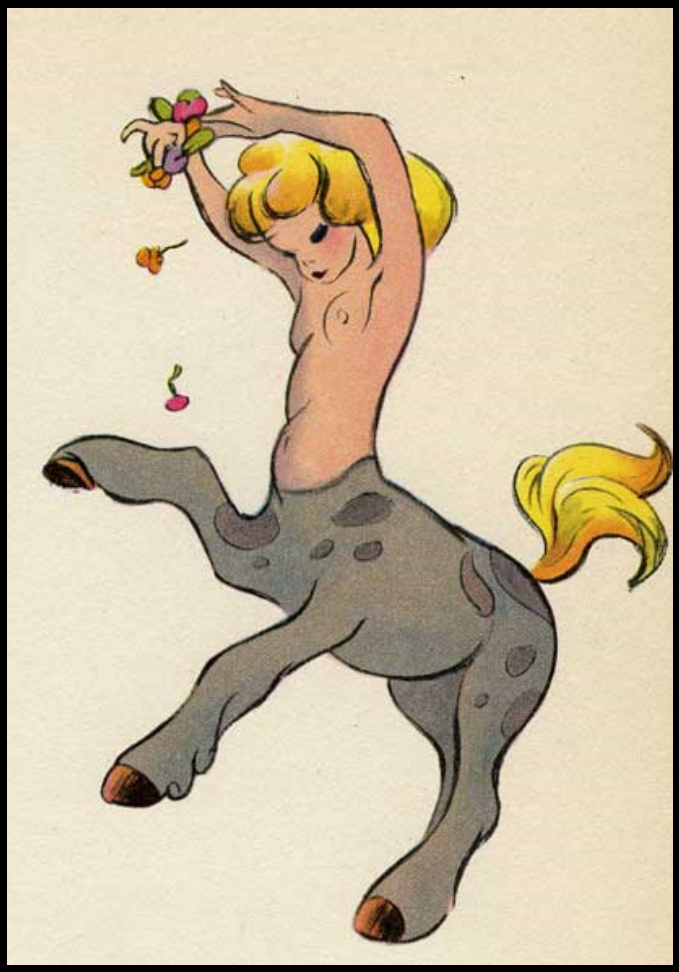
Well here it is! Unlike the Whitman version, there is no diagram to show where the creator of this scene imagined the figures should be placed. Although, the background is all planned out and locks together, I suspect that his thinking did not extend to the figures; and they are a bit of a jumble, of various scales and sizes. I dont think there is any right place to place them, or, for that matter, anyplace where they look "right".

The Mighty Zeus does not appear in this version, but Cupid is here, clearly labeled, holding his bow and Eros, as is Bacchus with a wineglass in his hand, sitting on his unicorn, actually an ass, endowed with a well-positioned horn. And, the central structure, and focal point that rises over the entire scene, appears to be a monumental tribute, erected to the Greco-Roman Deity, Priapus.

Apart from these two items, I know of no other Fantasia objects, made at the time, other than two series of china figurines by the American Pottery Company, and Vernon Kilns, of which I had a few, as a kid. Even then, I found them unattractive. There was also an attempt to generate a series of children's books based on the movie. A curious venture; but they actually featured drawings, generated by the Disney Studio, in the process of planning the film.

The one, simply called, "Pastoral" contains a handful of preliminary studio sketches and an attempt to relate the Pastoral Symphony in story form. The effort is light weight, with one exception. There is a Powerful painting of the Great God Zeus, parting the dark storm clouds and looking down from Mount Olympus on the "bedlham" he had caused, below.

The rest of the book is mainly pleasant pencil sketches of the cute, and, oh, so 1940s looking teenaged centaurettes. I believe one of these sketches became the direct inspiration, upon which the work of art that is coming next was based. Here is the sketch, quick and direct, and a little daring. But in1940, youth made toplessness OK. Being underage was considered sweet and innocent, in those days. As quick and spontaneous as this sketch is, I am convinced that it was the origin of the one extraordinary Fantasia item in Mouse Heaven.



In the days before plastic, there was a display firm in Chicago, called, W.L. Stensgaard & Associates Inc. They used wood as a medium to create beautifully sculpted displays. I remember one enchanting Christmas Window that carved its image in my brain, when I was small, and would do the same, today. It consisted of scenes form Snow White and Pinocchio, entirely carved in wood, and made, I now realize, by this company.

They also produced a series of figures from Fantasia that were intended to sell that hugely popular pre-war rage, nylon stockings. Picture this exquisitely carved and painted centaurette from Fantasia with a nylon stocking draped dramatically over her upraised leg.

I discovered this dynamic carving at my local flea market, 40 years ago. It was completely painted gold. In those days, most gold paint was created by mixing bronze powder with banana oil. Hooray! Banana oil is easily washed away! The process took all of half an hour, and not a speck of gold remains. It has been completely and harmlessly removed from even the deepest crevices on the intricately carved base. A brass label on the back of the base is also intact. The bottom of the base reads: “This unit is the property of Davenport Hoisery Mills and is loaned for the exclusive showing of Hummingbird Nylon Hoisery and is to be returned upon request or any time that you may want to discontinue its use...”

I have often fantasized an entire scene of these. The centaurettes did come in a variety of different colors. There is evidence of other characters as well. I would love to see, centaurs and satyrs, and drunken Bacchus on a donkey.

W.L. Stensgaard & Associates Inc.also created this stylish display figure of a gentleman, trying on a pair of trousers that someone, not me, converted into a lamp. Although, that adaptation is essentially a travesty, my original intention, when I acquired it at an Atlantic City, many years ago, to remove it, never took place. It shed such a warm and friendly glow, on the trunk beside the bed in the bell tower that I have left the lamp in place.

The sculpture is quite fascinating. It represents a mustached gentleman of the Esquire Magazine era, captured for all eternity, in wood, mid-way in the process of putting on, or taking off, a pair of pants. He is wearing an undergarment that I always associated with my Dad, a pair of "BVDs."

Surely, these sophisticated woodcarvings must have been created by some kind of a pantograph machine. Even if that is the case, there is evidence of extensive hand finishing.

Please, forgive me, for that diversion, and also for the following "rant" about Fantasia: No film in the history of the movies has been more used and abused than Fantasia. The Disney Company has sliced and diced and reheated this repast, and served it up, again and again, in so many diverse ways that the original might no longer exist. In the psychedelic 70s, they stretched the movie into the cinemascope format, the width of the screen, taking precedence over the integrity of the imagery, thus, rendering the already fat hippos wider still, as they frolicked among bubbles that were now elliptical. Wow Man! Whatta Trip! Apparently, a new generation saw it as a "trip, without drugs" (and often with). And, for the first time, the movie made money!

But, the worst transgression came when the Disney Company entirely redubbed the historical performance by Stokowski, which, by the way, was already on the cutting edge of stereo technology, at the time the film was made, and replaced it with the almost ad-libbed efforts of a little-known modern conductor, solely to improve the "sound quality"! That was the equivalent of redubbing historic performances of Caruso to replace his voice with that of a modern tenor, so they would be in stereo. How low can the misunderstanding of the historic and artistic integrity of this movie go?

History aside, the original animation was drawn to match every beat of Stokowski's performance. But it proved impossible for a live orchestra to match every frame of animation. Therefore, the frustrated new conductor just "winged it," and that's what Disney went with, in the end.

MICKEY MASKS

In the last years of the 1960s, there was a sort of passageway, spacious, but dimly lit, that led from the Pan Am Building to Grand Central Station. Perhaps, crowds of commuters poured through that area, during rush hour, but it was always deserted when I was there. Even on a sunny day, twilight reigned in this gloomy place. There was nothing there, except, against one wall, a single showcase, large, with glass on three sides. And balanced on a pole, in the very middle of it, looking as if it were floating in space, was a most incredible Mickey mask. My friend Henry Mazzeo Jr. who commuted, every day, told me it was there, so, I went to see it, and brought my camera with me. It was worth the journey.

A small sign explained that the mask was worn by Mickey Mouse Balloon handlers, in the early Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parades. The sign also proclaimed that this fabulous false face belonged to the artist, Claes Oldenburg. I made several pilgrimages to this secret temple, to stand in awe, before this haunting idol, glowing in the solitude, illuminated by a single spotlight. And I made a wish that, one day, Santa Claes would offer it to me. I got two of these masks, eventually!

Is Mickey saying, “Oooooo,!” or blowing hexagonal smoke rings? No! Those are just a line of warning circles, attached to the glass, hopefully, to prevent a crash!

There is something bold and daring about a Mickey Mouse mask. It hovers in that nether world, the narrow line between friendly and scary. Early Mickey masks were honest. They stated their case clearly, and never stooped to cutesy. The rubber face of Disneyland, on the other hand, is soaked in sugar candy, sweet, cloying, and unflinchingly upbeat. But in the early days, Mickey Mouse masks were simple statements that captured the essence of Mickey. The basic 1930s Mickey Halloween mask, made of gauze, was pure, powerful and iconic. The photograph, below, depicting charming multiples of Mickey, encountering a weird black cat, is one of the most "mousmerizing" that I have ever seen. Of the two Minnies, in the front row, the one with her legs crossed at the knees, is the more discreet.

These three vintage photographs are stacked, one above the other, in a very tall old frame. The nails that hold the back in place have rusted over, long ago. I rearranged the pictures, electronically, to fit them on this page. These photos are quite enchanting.

Mickey and Minnie are playing together, nicely. Sweet innocent children? Maybe!

Or is there an undercurrent of something vaguely sinister? Mickey is beckoning to Minnie with a gesture that signifies, come hither. I believe, they are from Germany.

Here are two Mickeys (a small peek of a fifth ear reveals the fact that there are, actually, at least, three). They cross that line, into the world of scary. They were photographed on a Paris Street in the early 1930s.

Brace yourself for a unique experience, a photograph that is truly Extraordinary! This is a meeting of the original Mickey Mouse Club that took place, as it did every Saturday, sometime, in the early 1930s. It is a surreal vision that you might see, either as a nightmare, or a pleasant dream, or, perhaps, somewhere, in between. My hope is that you are viewing it on a 24” screen.

Now, scroll down, and you will see, in person, many of the Masks we just saw in photographs. Before you scroll, might I suggest you do so, with One Eye Closed? This next showcase is the perfect place to experience Make-believe 3D. Give your eye some time to assess the situation, and, soon, the masks will emerge from the background, and appear to float in space.

At the top of the showcase, is my favorite paper mask of all. This amazingly powerful image of Clarabelle Cow, clearly made of circles, is one of the multitude of iconic paper masks, created by Einsen Freeman. In 50 years of collecting, this in the only Clarabelle I've ever seen. How can there be just one of these? I found it, at the first table I came across, at the first Stormville Flea market, in 1970. The price was just one dollar! Suddenly, I liked Dutchess county!

The paper masks of Mickey and Minnie, are the same as those that are shown in the hallucinatory photograph of the Mickey Mouse Club. Here, too, are the various masks, made of gauze, in both child and adult sizes, and in variations with tongue and teeth. At the bottom of the case, are two hand crafted Mickey masks, made by costume shops. And, between them, is an adult sized costume in the original box. Put it on, and you can resemble this handsome couple, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, hanging out, around the house.

Hanging around this schoolhouse, are other masks, as well. There may be too many, to photograph them all, but I will give it a try. First of all, here is one of the Mickey Mouse Parade masks. Actually, they were not made specifically for the Macy's Parade. They were standard papier mache masks, made in Germany, to be used, any time, by anybody. Kenneth Anger used this image of one of mine, from his film, "Mouse Heaven," to adorn the card that announces showings of the movie.

Where to place these masks to photograph them is a problem. Here, I have posed one on the finial, atop the stove, which is, of course, only safe to do in summer! I have posted the photo large, to give an impression of the size of these imposing icons. Actually, the mask is much bigger, in reality, than it appears here!

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Bigger, still, is the one, below. It is the official Kay Kaymen Mickey Mouse Costume, as it existed in the 1930s, the equivalent of the mouse one sees at Disneyland, today. It was made by Old King Cole Display, and has the official Kay Kamen orange and black label, inside. The rest of the costume is in there, too, a black velvet top, and red velvet pants, with silver buttons. Whenever Mickey made a personal appearance, during those early years, this is what he wore. Not knowing where to place this for its close up, I put it on Charlie Chaplin. Actually, he looks quite handsome and debonair!

The pie-cut openings in Mickey's eyes tend to disappear. I wonder if, at one time, there was some sort of white gauze there? On the shelf in the rear, we see another Mickey Mouse Mask. This one, a fairly recent acquisition, was made in France. On the wall, behind it, is a tall frame that contains four amazing animation drawings of Mickey, singing his signature tune, "Minnie's Yoo Hoo!"

Getting the mask, below, from an auction, in France, proved to be a nightmare. The auction house was incommunicado for two months, after the sale was done. Try as I might, I could not get an invoice or the shipping price. Finally, with some help from the collector, herself, whose mask it was, the auction house emailed me an invoice, which I immediately paid. Then, after the two month wait, they took it on themselves to send it by special courier, overnight. He accompanied it on the flight, then, drove it to my house, at many times the price of the actual mouse! For what the shipping cost, I could have flown to France, and picked it up, myself!

At a loss for where to put them, in order to shoot them, here are three masks, together, atop the showcase they crowd onto, along with many other objects, every day. This is the official Kay Kaymen Costume, along with the two German masks, of the kind used in the Thanksgiving Day Parade.

In the upper corner of the large showcase, in the Tall Tower, there is a papier mache Mickey Mouse mask, made in France. It is one of a series that attempts to render the flat paper masks by Einsen Freeman in full dimensional 3-D. Note that even the colorful shading is airbrushed in.

In the hall, there is a pair of papier mache Mickey masks that were made in Czechoslovakia. They are nearly identical, except for the fact that one has a bright red tongue, and the other one does not. They are simple in design, and display no emotion. They don't shout out or proclaim their presence. They whisper, quietly.

I suppose, as this page is dedicated to masks, the Mickey Mouse Gas Mask should be included here. My wife, Eunice, being English, remembers these. Years ago, she asked her dad, in Dover, to try to get me one. He did! I must confess, I was a little disappointed. It did not look the way I imagined it would be. It took me a long time to embrace it emotionally, and I must confess, I never fully did. It is more a Mickey, in name only, than in visual reality. I saw it more as a myth than a hit! Over the years, several of these have found their way to me. This one, in the box, is as good an example to show, as any.

Years later, another, more convincing one showed up. I believe, it is considerably rarer. The mask, itself, looks even less like Mickey. But it might explain the origin of the name, for, with it came this incredible canister to carry it, by the English tin toy manufacturer, Happy Knack. Apparently, the idea of including Mickey was to make the whole concept of a gas mask seem more friendly. Actually, the illustration on the can addresses the fact that it is scary. Mickey, wearing it, is actually attempting to frighten his nephews, by saying, "Booo-oo." One thinks "He's a bear," while the more astute of them, proclaims, "Sonly 'Unca' Mickey!"

Now, when it comes to scary, this Mickey Mask is really creepy. It is made out of some kind of leather, origin unknown. I have to say that I am uncomfortable with the vibrations that it radiates. And the fact that it comes from Germany isn't helping any! It sits, permanently, atop the potbellied stove, upstairs. And I tend to forget that it is there. I don't derive any pleasure from looking at it. Nonetheless, it is interesting, in a weird sort of way, and powerful! When one is surrounded by a thousand Mickeys, they start to look the same. This one is an un-refreshing change.

Forty-three years, later, I am still thinking of the time that I stood in that deserted passageway, lusting after an iconic effigy, securely enshrined in an isolated showcase. The moment stands out in my memory, like a never forgotten dream. Were it not for Mickey, being there, the dream might have been more like a nightmare. Now, after all these years, I believe my desire for a Mickey Mouse mask of my own has been more than satisfied. I guess I have acquired all the Mickey masks I need, or ever desired in my lifetime, with one exception, a mask that is totally unique. It was devised by those diabolically clever Germans. Who else would have thought of this, a Mickey Mouse Mask for the "Nasen!"

Micky-Maus-Masken

für die wir das **Alleinherstellungsrecht** haben.

No. 117/6 u. 146/15

No.	aus Karton.
132/6	Masken für Erwachsene
132 G/6	do. „ Kinder
117/6	Nasen

No.	aus Gaze.
132 D/6	Masken für Erwachsene
132 D/6 A	Theatermaske für Erwachsene, für Tanzzwecke, mit Trikothinterteil
132 DK/6	Masken für Kinder
146/15	Nasen

No.	aus Trikot.
1040/51	Trikotmasken für Erwachsene
1040/51 K	do. für Kinder

No.	Aufsetzkopf
154/47	Großer Aufsetzkopf, zirka 40 cm hoch

Micky-Maus-Kostüm siehe grüner Teil!

There are other masks around the house. I wonder if I should include them here? It's now, or never! Ok, the decision has been made! We're on our way! This is going to be a long page, and a long day, after all.

Here's Felix, cleverly disguised as Felix, hiding in plain sight!

“You lookin’ at me? If you dont like what you see, then, “watch it,” Buster. I’m cruisin’ for a fight!”

Popeye, also, has a rather spectacular mask. Asked, what he’s supposed to be, he replied: “I yam what I yam!"

Here is Der Captain Katzenjammer. This mask is absolutely huge, maybe big enough for two! I discovered it at Atlantic City. Although, I thought it was “good looking,” in a moment of generosity, I passed it on to a friend. A few years later, I bought it at an auction, when he sold his collection!

Here are two fragile fragments, The Captain from the Katzenjammer Kids, and Moon Mullins. They must have been part of an entire series of all the famous Comic Characters. These were crushed when I discovered them. It took a lot of TLC to get them into even this delicate condition. These are hand painted, quite nicely. I would love to have the entire set.

Here is Mr. Peanut, a mask that is extraordinary. It is made of some sort of clear material, perhaps, acetate. This mask is much earlier than you might think. On the back it reads “Made in France.” Its transparency catches light, in a most fascinating way. Lit from above, it glows dramatically, which proves to be a most eerie illusion, when on a person’s face.

This large Mr. Peanut shell has stood in the corner of this schoolhouse, for forty-three years, now. He seems like part of the house itself, and as such, I forget that he is there. I also forgot, until just now, posting the mask above, that he is a mask, as well, the largest one of all. This Mr. Peanut is the very one who used to appear on the Boardwalk at Atlantic City, every day. A piece of decorative wrapping ribbon from the Atlantic City Planters Peanut Store is still tied around his waist.

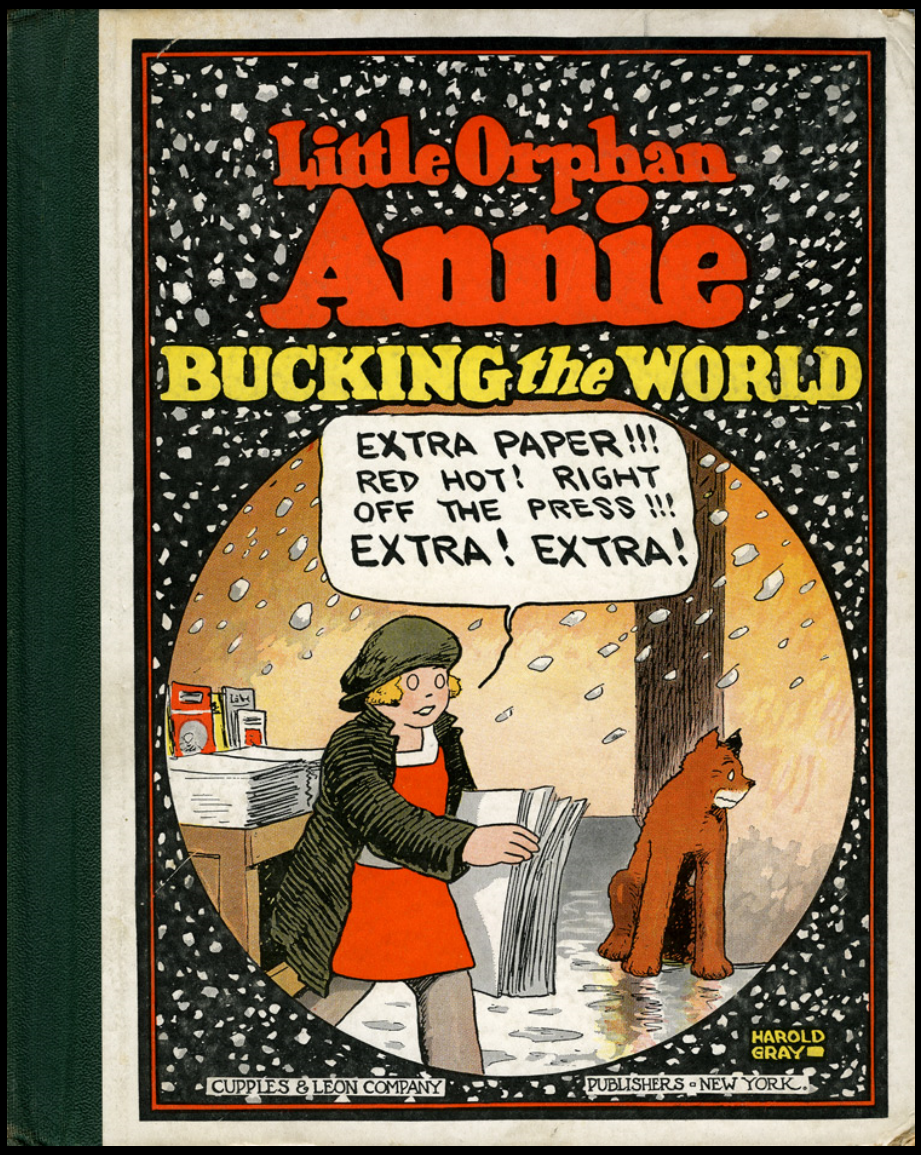
Following where this web page is leading, I just realized that I have a costume of Mr. Peanut's lookalike. I'm speaking of Charlie McCarthy. They both wear the a top hat and monocle. This box was stacked atop a cabinet, out of sight, and out of mind. Inside it, a costume, never worn, has been sleeping for half a century, or more, never dreaming it would be sought out, and photographed, today. Then, it will be put away, to wait for another day, and another person, who won't be me, to lift the lid, once more.

Costumes, like this, in elegant substantial boxes, were not necessarily meant for Halloween. They were sold in department stores, not in the five and dime. And they were a year-round part of play time, in the era, before TV. In spite of my proclamations of the pleasures of patina, artfully applied by the hard knocks of time, there is something thrilling about lifting the lid of a box, like this, to behold its pristine contents, absolutely mint! It kind of takes your breath away!

There is one final mask I will include. It sits over in a far corner, by the window, a place I rarely go, but when I do, it catches my eye, as it did, when I acquired it. And, for reasons that I can't explain, it pleases me. If one were to ask me if I liked "The Flintstones," I would reply that "I Yabba, Dabba, Don't!" But there is something about this mask, its enormous size, and audacious presence, that I like. It radiates an aura that is irresistibly up-beat. The unpleasant looking gentleman in the corner is "ThePolitician," a puppet, by Lou Bunin.

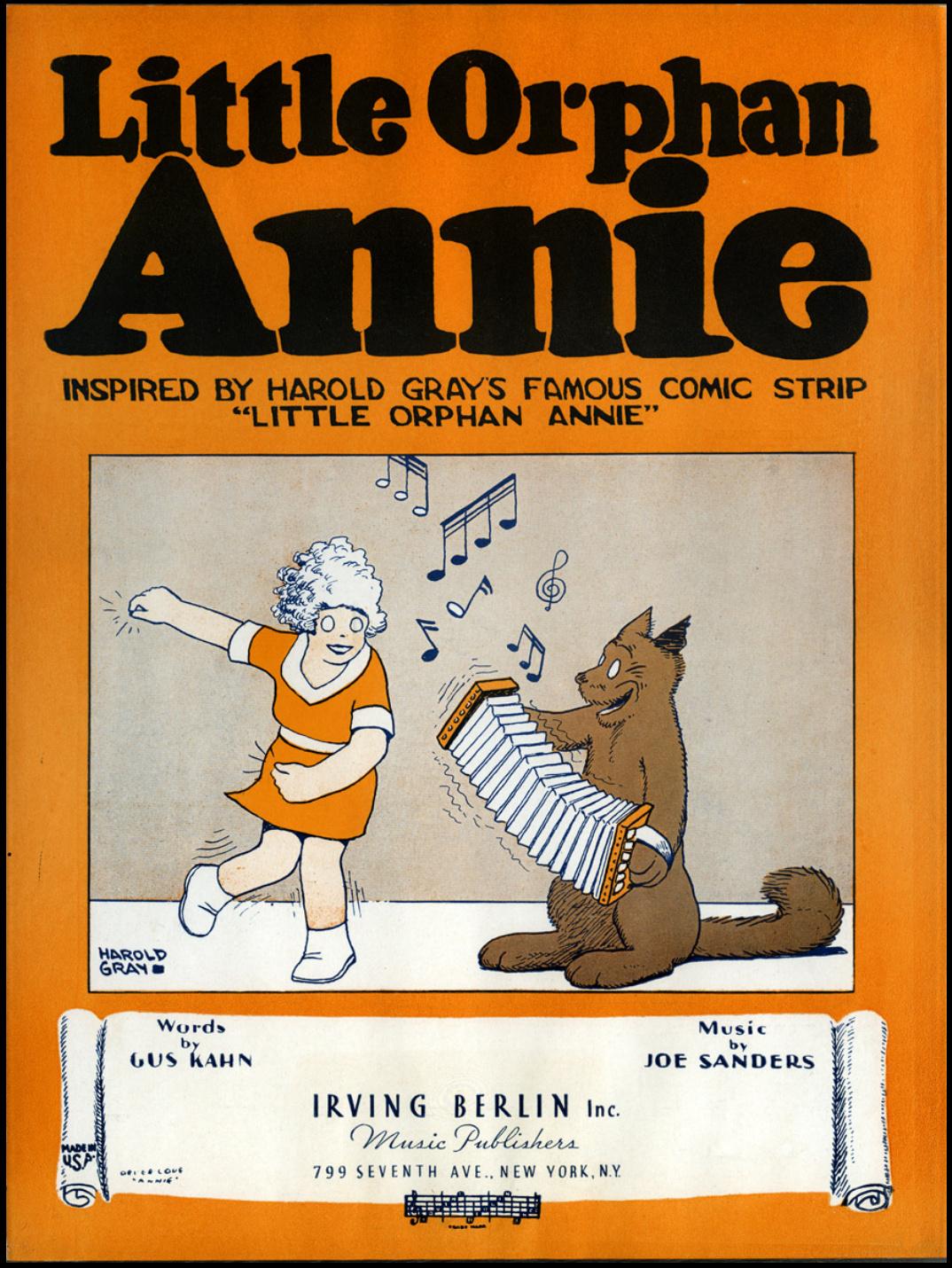
ORPHAN ANNIE

Harold Gray, who had been Sidney Smith's assistant on “The Gumps”, created “Little Orphan Annie” in 1924. The strip was not particularly well drawn, but the story that it told, of a spirited child, bucking the World, was a compelling one. It was a tale of rags to riches, and back agan. By the mid 30s, Little Orphan Annie had become the most popular comic strip in America.



Little Orphan Annie’s world was bleak, and mired in reality, and yet she had a fantasy adoptive father, "Daddy Warbucks", whose very name signified money, a fortune made, selling munitions, during the First World War. Annie represented the triumph of the human spirit, and irrepressible optimism, over the adversity of a hard knocks life. She also had a dog named, Sandy, who everybody on the planet knew said, “Arf!” Oh, and, by the way, she had no pupils in her eyes, and always wore the same red dress!

Somehow, this combination of elements added up to an appeal that was universal. But, one that, from my point of view, was, at best, elusive. The all-important visual elements were missing. Furthermore, Annie’s adventures, and the world she lived in, were far too down and dirty nitty-gritty realistic for me. But content-wise, Little Orphan Annie was a winning combination of elements that appealed to an optimistic nation, one that still believed that spunk and determination could win the day. She also had a collection of expressions, headed up by “Leapin Lizards” that were unique and catchy. And, even her name, “Little Orphan Annie” had a certain ring to it, a pleasant music that made it fun and melodic to say.



Annie, also, represented a comic strip for girls, one that boys, too, could follow, without embarrassment. And add to that, her pioneering place in Radio. She was on the cutting edge of "Tune in tomorrow" and "send away" for premiums, such as secret decoders that delivered coded messages about what was going to happen, on the show, the following day. In other words, Little Orphan Annie, more or less, had everything. Everything, that is, but great art. She didn't have the visual excitement that made other Comic Characters appealing, because of their look, alone. Harold Gray's artwork was honest, stiff, straightforward, and purely illustrative. It told a story, without any superfluous visual distractions.

Annie's one area of visual fascination and distinction was her conspicuous lack of eyeballs. Why this look was so instantly apparent in Annie, while it went unnoticed in Jiggs and Maggie, remains a mystery. Looking at the span of Anny products, it is interesting to note that some manufacturers could not feel comfortable with this anomaly, and, therefore, major items, like the official Orphan Annie Doll were produced with pupils, painted in.

The Orphan Annie doll, of all the Annie products, to my eye, is the most appealing. The box displays a piece of original art by Harold Gray, himself, that is really excellent. And all the contents of the package, as well, are near perfection. The fact that it also included Sandy was a tremendous plus. And for good measure, they threw in a precious tiny comic book, relating one of Annie's adventures. Her dress, her socks, her little patent leather shoes, all were perfection . And then we get to her eyes. The manufacturer was all right with showing her eyeless on the package, and Sandy could be presented as an accessory, without pupils in his eyes, but Not Annie! This is where conventionality and timidity drew the line, and drew in beautiful blue eyes. Someone at the company decided that little girls could not identify with a doll that, to some people, looked blind.

Another product that can credit Harold Gray with a package that is exquisite, is this Little Orphan Annie Costume. The cover artwork is a fantasy, Daddy Warbucks, confused by a crowd of Annie lookalikes. The entire presentation, the cheesy cheese cloth mask, the pristine outfit, and the perky little hat, all perfectly intact, along with the box that suggests a surreal situation, makes a kind of statement, hard to define, but is sort of like a Work of Art.

Most of my modest Annie collection ended up in this showcase, which it shares with the Little King. Both of them are Little, both are red, both always wear the same thing. Indeed, they have a lot in common! Most of all, they share a mutual lack of space. In the center of the showcase is one of the all-time most delicious premiums, the "Orphan Annie Circus." This is one giveaway that was worth waiting for. It did not disappoint! Spectacular in size, it recreated Annie's time, working at the circus, one of her most appealing adventures, and featured several additional characters that momentarily entered her life. It also offered a menagerie of paper animals that were, in fact, genuine nodders, with heads that balanced cleverly, and kept moving incessantly.

At this end of the showcase, a group of Annies have gathered, overseen by the Einson Freeman mask. Here was an opportunity to create the ultimate iconic image, but, for once, they missed the mark. Once again, we come eyeball to eyeball with the eyeball conundrum. The Einson Freeman artists, clearly, couldn't decide what to do about Annie's eyes, so they settled on a compromise. The pupils, or at least a faint hint of them, are half there and half not. The various paper cutouts are Xerox copies of those in the uncut book on the right side. This is the companion publication to to the Skeezix version that we saw earlier. There are also oilcloth dolls of Annie and Sandy, and two Celluloid Annies with catatonic eyes.

In this showcase one can also see a rarity, Perhaps the most, and only, unique Annie item, here, a handsome pair of German nodders that are considerably oversized. In this larger size, the smaller Annie of the Nodder series gets moveable arms. I mention her, here, in another respect, as well. The solution that the stunningly objective artist who did the German Nodders intuitively saw as the essence of what was going on with Annie's eyes, and simply painted the white orbs blue. It works, and takes the edge off, nicely. Suddenly, her eyes and Sandy's too, go from weird to pretty.

There was a raft of Annie products made that say a lot about society's view of a woman's role, in the first half of the 20th Century. If Annie were "born" today, she would, no doubt, be an action hero, fighting felons, while toting an arsenal of hi-tech weaponry. But, in her own era, all the products that bore her name were, essentially, involved with domesticity, Knitting sets ...

Embroidery sets ... This cover is a poignant allegorical fantasy. Annie and Sandy stand on a pair of frozen asteroids, floating in the star studded emptiness of outer space. Annie's hands are in her pockets. Sandy's tail's between his legs. Their body language conveys the fact that they are cold. They stare at a foreboding World. The door is shut and bolted. A sign proclaims, "No Orphans Wanted!". It's enough to make you cry, while you play with the unrelated toy, inside.

Sewing sets ... Who are those strange men? This captures all the charm of the Depression.

Little Orphan Annie Clothespins, for hanging up the laundry.

Baking sets ... with Annie only on the cover. The contents are generic!

And the most classic and popular Little Orphan Annie item of them all, the Little Orphan Annie Stove. This austere and colorless object was a runaway best seller.

The toy manufacturing community certainly knew where Annie's place should be... In the kitchen! Right Sandy? "ARF!" Annie was one tough cookie; she could stand the heat! What a bummer this stove is. I cant imagine a more depressing toy product. I suppose real stoves looked just like this, during the Depression. In fact, that's, maybe, why they called it that!

I can't believe I was planning on ending this page right here. I taxed my brain for something more visually pleasing, and, suddenly, remembered a photograph I shot, particularly, to go with Annie, and forgot. So we will end the page with that.

When we first moved to this house, it had next to no facilities, or viable heat, and was depressing, to say the least. And the Oven, by the way, formerly belonging to a nun, looked just like the one above! The collection was all packed away, not to see the light of day, again, for 3 more years. I continued to collect, nonetheless.

The first year we were here, 1970, my friend Al Horen and I discovered an enormous old chicken coop in Kingston. It was the subject of local urban legend, rumored to be full of toys. It was! We found the owner, and Al, using his usual line, "Don't you like money?" talked his way in. It contained the rotting residue of an old toy store. The present owner of this cast off merchandise, knew nothing about what was there. He allowed us to dig through it, and fill Al's van to overflowing, weighing the cartons as we filled them, and pricing the contents by the pound. At times, we were climbing atop stacks of boxes ten feet high. That's when I found the bottom half of this Little Orphan Annie lamp. Sandy's head was gone. Destiny decreed that, an hour later, I would find the missing piece. Al found the lampshade. Driving home, we made a trade. I gave him a Linemar windup Popeye basketball windup that I had just dug up, in exchange for Orphan Annie's shade.

And so it was, this Annie Lamp was set alight, among the cold unfinished space of this nearly vacant building, and not turned off again, for several years. With walls torn down around it, it shone, amidst the rubble, throughout many a cold winter night. And there were times when this Orphan Annie lamp seemed like the only lamp on Earth, alight. Its lonely glow was like a ray of hope, promising better times.

SOUND & LIGHT

Hiding just beneath the surface of these deliciously decorated contraptions, was the makings of a miracle. It was indeed wonderful to be around at the time. They represent the first steps on a journey I have been privileged to witness with great interest, throughout my lifetime, as sound and moving images entered our homes and daily lives. All this is taken for granted by today's generation. My grandson, who is six, complains that his computer is too slow. He will never know the thrill of seeing a faint hand cranked image of Mickey Mouse flickering on his bedroom wall. Nor will he ever hear the comical sound of a Victrola, winding down, or strive to achieve better sound, in the only way possible, at the time, by inserting a new needle, when the old one has worn out!.

In the beginning of the history of the movies, toys and technology were intermingled. Many an optical toy preceded the invention of the cinema. And, in the 1930s, this technology was decorated in colorful ways to become toys again. Here are radios, cameras, and projectors of every kind, all striving to produce sight and sound, and all bearing the image of Mickey Mouse.

In the showcase, below, we find an example of every (real) American variation of the 1930's Mickey Mouse Radio. They were all made by Emerson. This was the very beginning of sound technology. And, apart from requiring a long wire that served as an aerial, the electrical cord, itself, was thick, cloth covered, and required, as part of the operating principle, to get quite HOT!

The first models were exquisitely sculpted on front, sides, and top, and cast in sirocco. One of the most memorable moments, in my early days of collecting, was when I was offered one of these radios, by mail, for only fifteen dollars. Of course, the price was nice, but what was really exciting was opening the shipping carton to discover that the radio was packed in its original orange and black box! The seller had never mentioned that. Surprises like this are just about as good as collecting gets. The box is a little rough, but I would not exchange it for another, even one that was much better. I consider this one to be a gift, sent to me by Destiny.

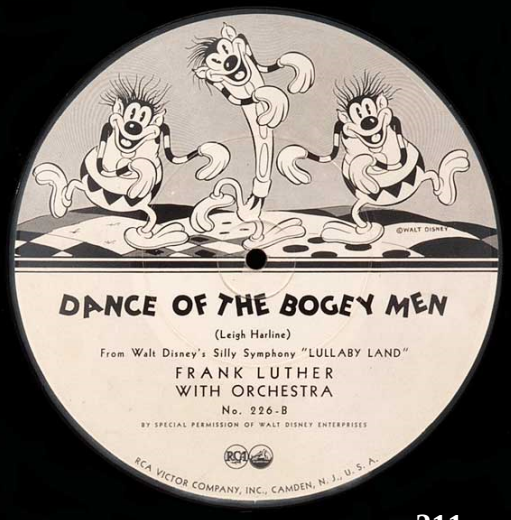
The next variations of the Mickey Radio were easier to manufacture, just wooden boxes with metal trim, nailed on. They came in two color variations, cream and black. The metal triangles bore images of Disney characters that unfortunately wore off easily. Here, too, is the painted version of the Snow White radio. There were two other versions, standard and deluxe, But this is the only one that was in color.

The radio below, is the larger of the two unpainted Snow White radios, the deluxe model. By 1938, technology and sound quality had improved considerably, and this bigger better radio even had an illuminated dial.

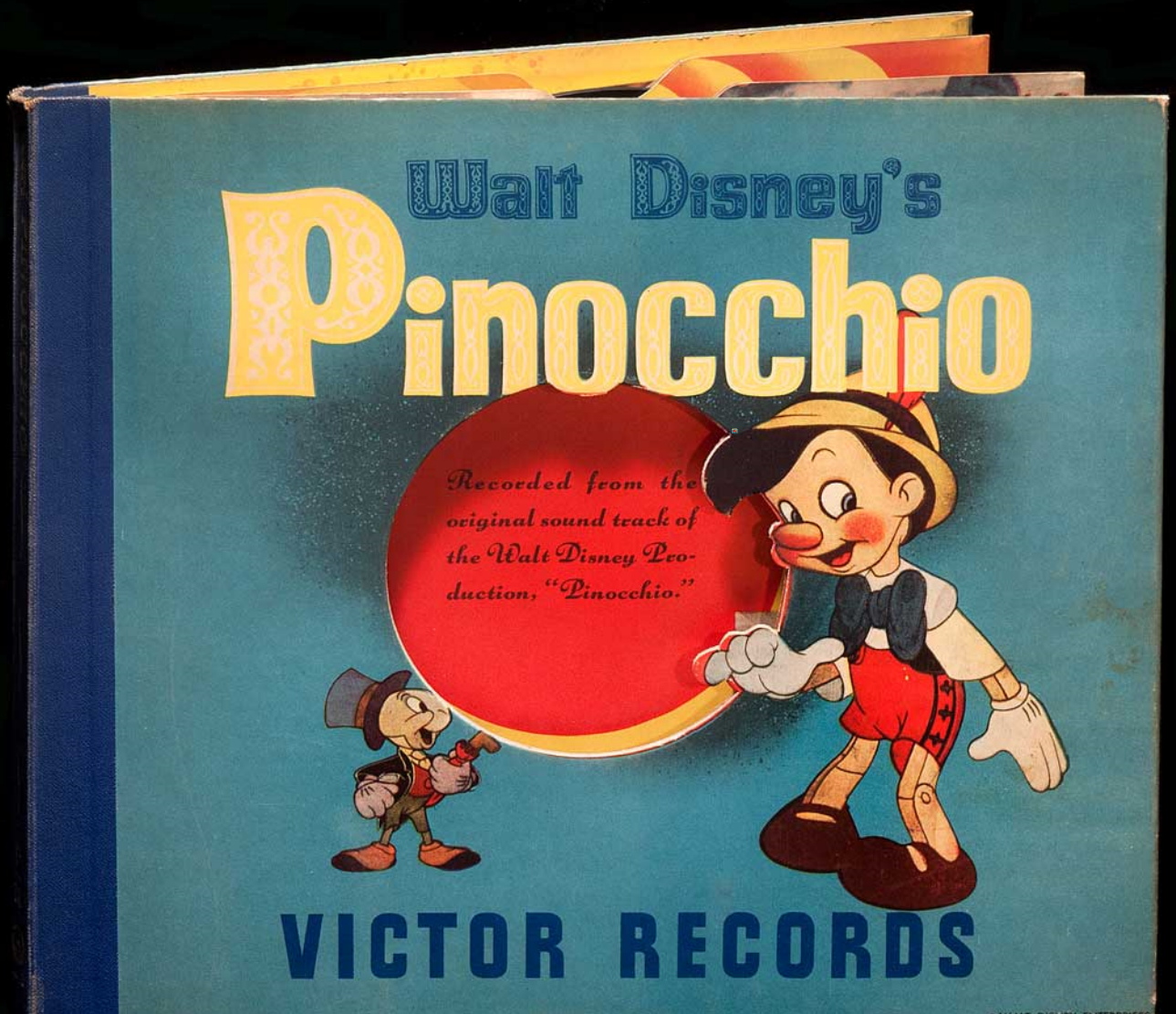
In the very middle of the showcase, above the radio, is something that is very rare. "The Emerson Mickey Mouse Phonograph." The number of these that I can verify, can be counted on one hand, Mickey's hand, not mine; only four digits neccessary, not five! When I purchased this phonograph, the dealer couple, who sold it to me, nearly had twin coronaries. Although, they specialized in toys, it was the only thing they'd ever sold me. They $uddenly felt they mu$t have made a di$a$terous mi$take!

On the turntable, along with some German porcelain musicians, is a Disney record from a set produced in England that is very pretty, and rather rare. "Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies." This set is really heavy; it contains six disks! All are original sound tracks!

Rarer still, is the series of three picture records. There are attractive images on both sides of these. They were made in 1934.



One day, when I was four, my father came home with a huge old console style standing Victoria. It was dark mahogany with animal feet on the ends of its gracefully curved legs. It was so tall that I could barely reach the turntable. He also brought one set of records, the sound track music from Pinocchio. I listened to these, nearly every day, until I knew every single sound effect, from the tiny tinkle of Gepetto's music boxes, and the winding of their keys, to the familiar tweets of "Give a Little Whistle." I'd wind the crank on the side, and sit on the floor, among the paws, and study the delicious picture on the record cover. This is not my original set of records; I literally wore those away. And the picture of Pinocchio was deeply embossed, from the many times I tried to trace it. This set is the first edition It is much fancier than mine. Here, the cover is die-cut, and there are pictures, and a story, on all the record sleeves. It's in incredible condition.



The “audio” department is upstairs. Now, lets head downstairs. Along the side of the couch, is a long showcase that many do not notice is there. It is full of all things “visual.” Here is nearly every device, known, at the time, for projecting images as a beam of light.

Some of these devices were genuine projectors, capable of showing everything from slides to movies. Others were whacky attempts at alternate technologies that, ultimately, led nowhere. One such crazy gadget, seen on the left, is a variation of the “Movie Jector,” appropriately called, the “Talkie Jector.” It was a hopelessly failed attempt at emulating real sound motion pictures. A hot light bulb, inside the tin box, projects faint images of simple two phase animation, printed in color, on rolls of paper. Inside the device, a primitive tin flap acts as a shutter, revealing one image, then, the other, while the the crank, not only moves the film along, but also manually rotates a 78 RPM recording that sits on the very top. Turning the crank at constant speed is utterly impossible, and the resulting sound is comical. That is, until you touch the case and burn yourself. Toys like this could only exist, in the days before toy safety rules.

Moving to the right, we come to several elaborate sets of English Lantern Slide projectors. The boxes are quite wonderful. The slides, themselves, crude images, printed on glass, are terrible. Yet, these were produced profusely, and were very popular, with many sets of slides available.

In the middle of the showcase is a toy that I had as a kid, but not in this glorious box, "The Keystone Mickey Mouse Projector." The inside of the lid is a screen, on which one can project the image. The sides depict a darkened theater, with Disney characters, watching a Mickey Movie. This heavy duty version was made in this delightful box, for one year, only. The following year, the projector got simpler, and the box was replaced by one printed on plain brown corrugated.

Lest you notice those two bogus "Kodak" cameras, and mistakenly think that their inclusion, here, gives them some vestige of authenticity, let me clear the matter up. These comical attempts at fakery have somehow wormed their way into acquiring the status of semi-authenticity, among the uninformed. To me, they are evidence of man's gullibility, and eager willingness to suspend disbelief. They are so obviously phony as to be almost funny. Yet, both Disney and Kodak, who, never heard of them, before 1995, nor have any record of them, allow that "they might have been prototypes."

I picked these two up, in the mid-90s, the very instant that they first appeared, at the Stormville Flea market, for fifty bucks apiece, as a kind of curiosity. The young man, who sold them to me had a bunch. He claimed he got them from someone, who drove up with a pickup truck with a pile of them in the open bed.

I thought they were momentarily intriguing, possibly amusing, and, if the Kodak Brownie Six turned out to be as modern as my intuition told me it was, they would, at least, be worth a laugh, if not fifty bucks. Quick research proved the latter to be the case. The camera was made in 1946! Someone, trying to make a convincing 1930s artifact by placing a decal on a camera, not manufactured, until 1946, the Brownie Target Six-20, was definitely making a forgery faux pas! These cameras, minus the phony decal, are available in unlimited quantities on eBay , even now, for under twenty dollars.

The Mickey image, title lettering, and the copyright notice, “by permission of Walt Disney Enterprises” as well as the colors and “look” were, clearly, copied from the 1934 Mickey Mouse Keystone projector. (on the right) The copyright notice “Mickey Mouse Enterprises”, by the way, was used for the last time in 1939. Any sign of 1930s Mickey graphics was long gone, along with most sightings of Mickey Mouse, himself, by 1946. There was no way Disney would allow use of a Mickey image, ten years out of date. This was Donald's era, and a "Donald Duck Camera" was produced, that year, by the Herbert George Company of Chicago. It was molded plastic and bore the copyright "Walt Disney Productions."

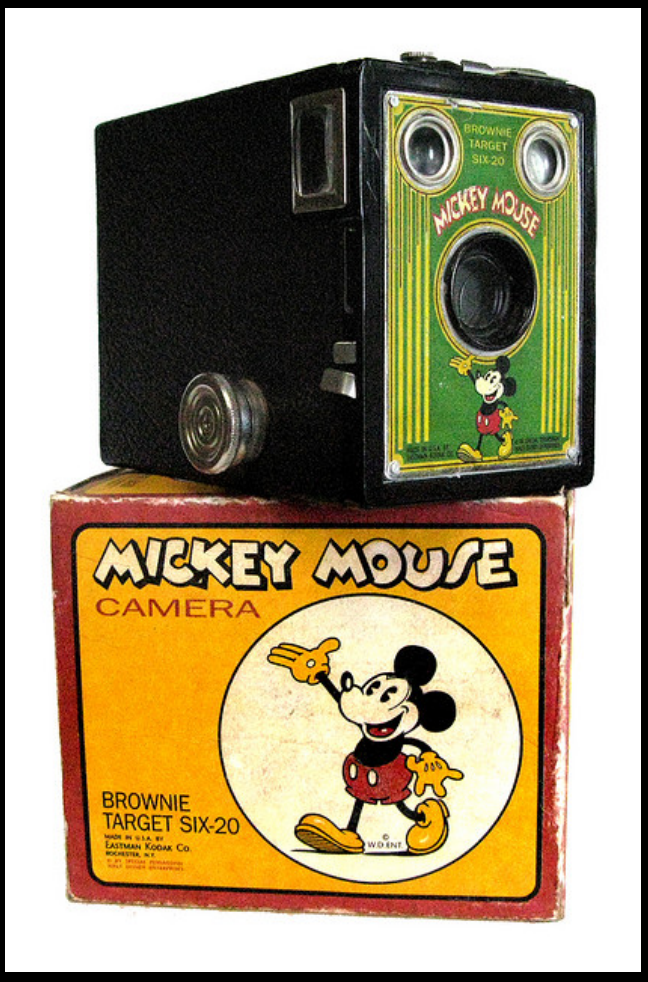
Incidently, for those who try to excuse this absurdity by speculating that the Mickey Mouse face plates might have been made earlier, and applied to these cameras, later, dream on! The original 1946 “Brownie Target Six-20” black and silver printed face plates are still there, underneath the Mickey Mouse decals.

Isn’t it curious that, among the many examples of this camera that have appeared, to date, some of which are in various states of wear, in no case, is the delicate decal on the face plate ever nicked or scratched. Could that be because the person, who, manually, put some age on these, didn’t want the original Brownie Six face plate to be seen? The Black of the original begins just under where the Mickey decal ends. The slightest nick, along the edge, would disclose the fact that it is there.

Many good natured people (especially, those with one of these to sell) are inclined to search for some innocent explanation for the existence of these. They are reluctant to suspect the obvious, namely that these were an attempt to deceive!

Whoever made these was also dabbling with doing the same with watches. I also got this at Stormville, at the same time the cameras appeared. Here is the same art and distinctive red and white lettering, traceable to only the keystone projector, and the same exact kind of low quality decal, applied to a pocket watch. The watch dial, itself, is original and printed. Only the Mickey image, the words Mickey Mouse, and the Disney copyright are thick decals, easily apparent, in person. These were applied to an Ingram watch. Alas, it is a well-documented fact that only Ingersoll had the Disney license. So this application is as out of whack as a 1930s decal on a 1946 camera. Nice try! The guy who made these bumbling attempts, got luckier with the camera! I sense that this whole enterprise might have begun as misdirected fun, not intended to become grand larceny. The pocket watch was only fifteen bucks.

Then, about a year or two later, when it looked like these things were being well received, in spite of their innate absurdity, the forger got serious and came up with a “box”. This cunningly contrived combo of box and camera, together, has been known to go for thousands, at auction.



The first time I saw one of these “original boxes” was at an Atlantic City Show with my friend Carl Lobel. We have been known to detect a phony toy or two, calling ourselves the “Hardy Boys” or “Toy Busters,” and specializing in uncovering toy forgery. Our most notable case took place, some years ago, The forger was outed by an extensive article, by Leta Solis-Cohen, in the Maine Antiques Digest. His name was revealed in a roundabout way, hidden in the title. That caused him to lay low, for a while. Now, he’s back again, specializing in, among other things, Mickey dolls, dressed like Santa Claus, and a new line of bogus bisques, all offered on eBay.

Anyway, Carl came running up, with the box, in hand. We were somewhat amazed, as we assumed the cameras to be fakes. Suddenly, here was this strange box. It took us two minutes to discover that there was one accidental flaw that completely robbed this artificially “distressed” piece of fakery of any vestige of authenticity. The box, yellowed with age, had been dipped in some kind of stain to tint the paper tan. But, on one side panel, there was a triangular shaped area that the liquid missed, and thus, this patch remained unstained. It was as bright and white, as the card stock had originally been, at the time the box was printed, most likely, a week before!

This enthusiastic forger has since come up with a later and smaller version of the camera. At this rate, we might, someday, witness surprises, like 1930s Mickey Mouse I-pods, “by permission of Walt Disney Enterprises!"

At the front of this showcase, is the Ensign Mickey Mouse Camera, made in England. It is the only real Mickey Mouse camera in the case, and the only Mickey camera made in the 1930s. It is rather unattractive with its plain brown camera case, and a label that is only a foil sticker. Behind it, is a French device, called, "Cine Mickey," which is really a Movie Jector, made entirely out of heavy paper, complete with all its numbered films.

Next to it, is the Safe-Toy Cinema, an English Projector that is quite bizarre. It uses its own kind of film, with a single hole in-between each frame. The colorful box is wonderful. Another larger version is further along, with its own folding screen and a large handsome box. And, in front of that, is the silent version of the Movie Jector.

As this page is called Sound and Light there are a few other things that should be included here.

This large tin lithographed theater, designed for showing "movies," or, at least, emulating the experience, is really rather handsome. Simply called the “Comic Theater,” it is quite elegant in its straight forward simplicity. I have the original box, somewhere. Alas, I stored it under the floor, and have misplaced it. I had really hoped to include it here, as, even though, it is quite plain and ugly, it shows that the toy was made by a small company in Kansas City, Disney’s home town! The movie, sadly, isn’t Disney. It’s titled “Bunny’s Escape” by “Vic Vac”. The toy is labeled Patent Pending and a patent was granted in 1933.

Bridging the gap between sound and light is this romantic Radio Light. This is what folks gazed at, in the days before TV. Here Mickey rows his boat, on a moonlit lake, at night. The rays of the full moon gently dance upon the rippling water, as clouds, floating in a misty sky, sail silently past the moon, and momentarily eclipse its light., Minnie to protect her pie-cut eyes from starlight, holds her parasol, on high. In the distance, a snowcapped mountain rises. It looks suspiciously like Mount Fuji. Could this mysteriously enchanting object have been "Made in Japan"?

There are two more light related objects in Mouse Heaven that, while it might be a stretch, I have decided to include, here. Both of them happen to be lamps, yet, both are magic, and both of them are works of art.

The first is, either, a work of genius, or evidence of madness, a piece of “folk art” in the form of a standing floor lamp. If any object was destined to eventually belong to me, this one would be it. This lamp tracked me for years. Way back, in 1970, it was offered to me by a dealer in Seattle, at a price that, then, seemed obscene. Years later, it was offered, again, by another dealer in Los Angeles, who claimed that it once stood in the office of Walt Disney! That possibility was hilarious. I am certain he would hate it.

More time passed, and eventually, it turned up in the collection of Ken Anger. Kenneth’s history has had its ups and downs, to say the least. And, at one of the down times, he sold the lamp to me. When Ken is down, he sells things. When he is up, he gives them away. Either way, he is the very embodiment of generosity.

Nothing about this monument to excess is ordinary! The colors,are not distressed, but iridescent. Many of them are metallic. The wooden shade is covered with rough concrete. And the Mickeys! There are many, many, Mickeys! I tried to count them once, I believe the number was something like over 50. Whoever made this Mousterpiece must have really liked Mickey Mouse a lot! They even carved a pair of matching Mickey cigarette holders. There are pieces missing from the bottom of the tray; the nail holes are still there. Could they have, maybe, been more Mickeys?

Photographing this did not prove to be easy. The spot it’s in is so busy. Here are two tries, side by side.

The second object is an iron ceiling fixture that I got on eBay. It was found in an old barn, buried under years of hay. Clearly, it was made in Mickey's heyday. It certainly shows its age, and wears its history on its sleeve, evidenced by the rust of half a Century. And it insists it wants to stay that way!

But this surface patina, gone crazy, does not detract from the spell of absolute magic that this lamp casts, in the form of enchanted shadows. When the sun goes down, and the light is lit, it becomes a Magic Lantern, a larger than life Optical Toy, painting the likenesses of Mickey Mouse and his familiar pals, across the canvas of the ceiling!

Here in the azure glow of a glorious Maxfield Parish Sunset, we see the twin reflections, floating in the sky beyond the windows, like friendly flying saucers, with all our Disney Friends, on board. Surely, this no mere ceiling fixture. It is a Work of Art. And it is Magic!

LARS DOLLS

Lars" was an Italian doll Manufacturer that made a huge line of high quality felt dolls, beginning in the the 1930s or 40s, continuing throughout the 1950s 60s, and beyond. Their vast line included a multitude of Comic Characters, especially Tom and Jerry, and every conceivable Disney Character, from the more common ones, to the most obscure. If one looks up "Lars Dolls" on Google, today, they come face to face with a Movie called, "Lars and the Real Girl." OMG! How times have changed!!

Much of the interest in collecting Lars dolls, over the past thirty years, would appear to have been centered on the few Lars Disney dolls that appeared, here, in the USA. The same handful of dolls changed hands often, occasionally achieving high prices at auction. Believe it or not, I was intimately connected with those few dolls that came across the sea. And, the fact that, at some point, I owned 90% of them has, essentially, been a secret, until now.

At Christmas time, in 1968, a group of Lars dolls appeared at Bloomingdale's, in New York City. I bought a Mickey and Minnie, in spite of the fact that they were what I called, "New Mickey", meaning they had eyeballs. I promptly repainted the eyes, giving them pie-cuts. John Fawcett asked me if I would pick him up a pair, so, I did.

I had just begun working in the toy industry, and that year the "International Toy Fair" took place at a hotel, near Central Park. There was a mezzanine, with various exhibits from foreign countries, including Italy. And, Oh my God, an enormous exhibit from Lars! It was absolutely mind boggling. Around the entire perimeter of the hall, there was a long shelf, and on it sat several hundred Lars dolls. Seeing this stuff, I went nuts! And, then, to my delight, I met the president of the company, Mr. Segardo. Observing my enthusiasm, he seemed to be delighted to meet me, too. He only spoke Italian and a little French. And I only spoke English and high school French that was quite awful, in spite of the fact that I had lived a year in France. Nonetheless, out of sheer inspiration/desperation, I made myself understood. We ended up sitting at the hotel bar all afternoon, plotting a course of action. To this day, I don't know if he thought I was a toy store owner, or just his most enthusiastic fan. But my heart skipped a beat when he said, "Yes, you can order all the dolls you want, and we'll gladly ship them to you."

In the course of the conversation, we spoke about Mickey Mouse, and he said, "We designed a pair of Mickey and Minnie dolls, many years ago, that we called "tipo vecchio", which means "old style". He explained that these dolls were made especially for Walt Disney, himself, and were never sold to the public. Disney would order them, and give them to dignitaries, who visited the Studio. They hadn't made any, for many years, but they did still have the patterns.

I know this story to be true, because when I later saw them, in person, I realized that I had seen one of those dolls on TV. It had been on a Disney special that featured Ward Kimball. One segment dealt with old stuff, and, standing in front of a Mickey's Nightmare poster, Ward showed a 20 inch tall Mickey Mouse on a pedestal. It was quite unlike any doll I had ever seen, before. Now, in retrospect, I realized that it was one of the original "tipo vecchio" dolls, made for Walt, himself.

Looking at Google, just now, I discovered this small photo of Ward's actual doll. It was sold in one of the several Ward Kimball auctions my friend Noel Barrett conducted, in 2004.

I asked/begged Monsieur Segardo if I could buy some of the dolls on display. He said, emphatically, that he couldn't sell those. My first thought was that it would seem logical to sell them here, and save the costs of shipping them back to Italy. But now, I realize why he couldn't part with any. They were, no doubt, the only samples. The factory only manufactured dolls to order. I believe that, like the display firm I once worked for, one master sample was made, which, in turn, was duplicated, only when necessary, to fill orders. The samples on display at the International Toy Fair were, indeed, one of a kind!

I might add that some of the few colored photos in the Disneyana book by Cecil Munsey show Lars dolls. But those photographs were not taken at the Disney Studio. They are, actually, some of the sample photos Lars photographed in its own factory. They were the same shots I was looking at, along with hundreds more, in the photo albums at the Toy Fair. This was further evidence of my growing belief that not many Lars dolls came to the USA at all.

I asked Monsieur Segardo, again, about the "tipo vecchios". I ordered a pair just like he made for Disney, but, having seen some huge display models, 4 feet tall, of other characters, like a tall Grandma Duck that was on display. I asked if he could make the Mickey and Minnie that large, as well. He said, "Oh no. It would not work. Their heads would be too big and heavy, and they would topple over." I said, "Would you try?" "I will ask the factory." he replied.

Together, we filled out an order form for a wildly impulsive selection of dolls, which I had to take to an importing office in Manhattan, where I did a lot of paper work to have them shipped to me. Then, I bought an international money order, and sent it off to Italy. Several months later, the dolls arrived at a customs house, on the docks of the lower West Side.

I induced Colorform's delivery man to take me to the pier in the company van. Waiting for us at the warehouse, was a large wooden crate, not unlike a coffin. We put it in the back of the vehicle, and drove away, without a problem. Within half an hour, I was happily dragging the crate up the staircase to my loft on Lexington Avenue.

Out of the box came the pair of "tipo vecchio". They really were terrific, and, Yes, it was the same Mickey that I had seen with Ward Kimball on the Disney show. They were the original size, about 22". There was also a Goofy and two Plutos. The Plutos were good, and Goofy, who was standing with a hoe, was great. He and one Pluto had both been pictured in the Munsey book. Not caring much for Horace and Clarabelle, who were late images, I passed them along to John Fawcett, for what I had paid for them.

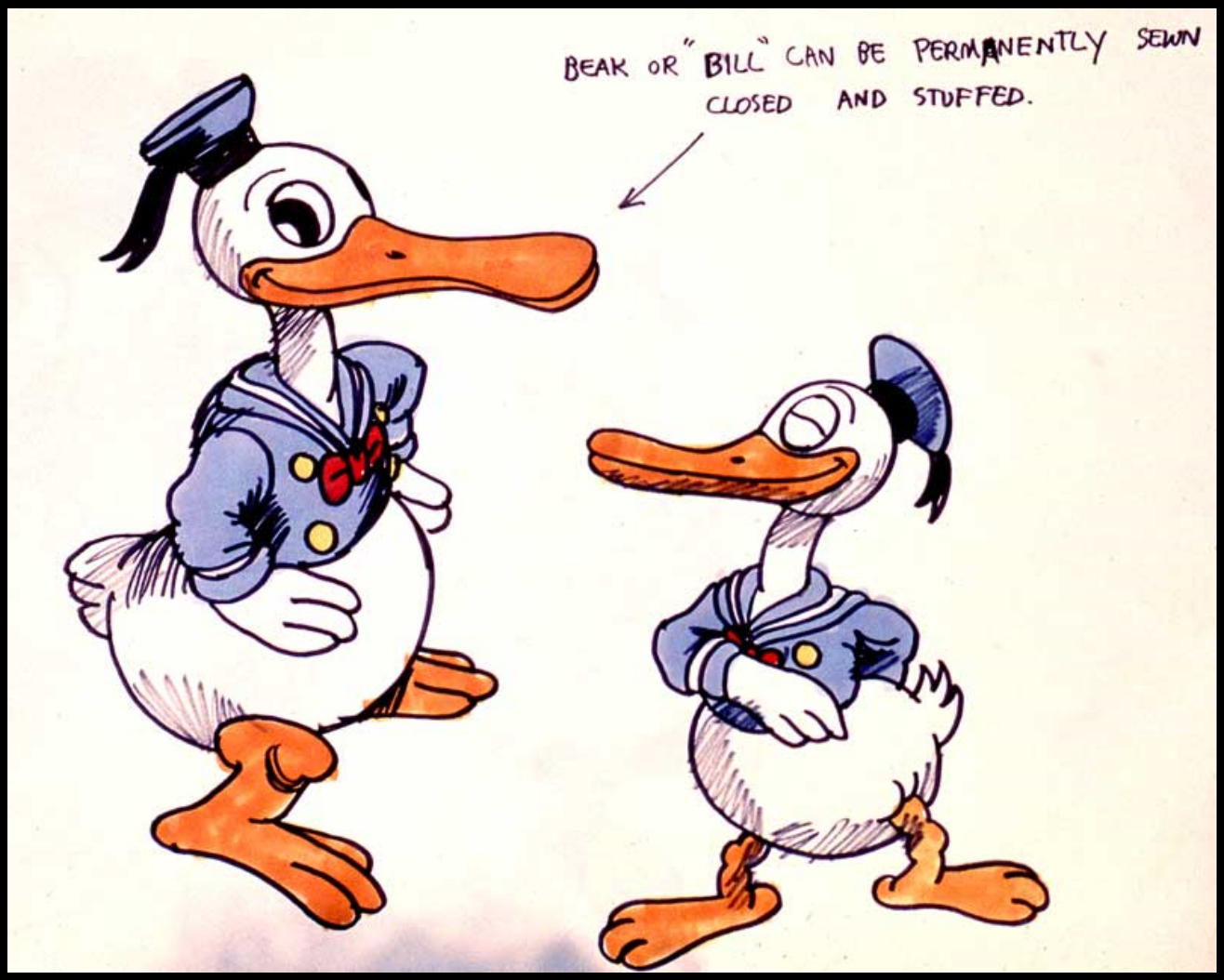
Meanwhile, his wife Jacqui, pointing out that she needed a present for John's upcoming birthday, asked me if I could get her a set of the Three Caballeros for her to give to him?" I said she could have mine, because there wasnt enough time, and I could easily order more!"

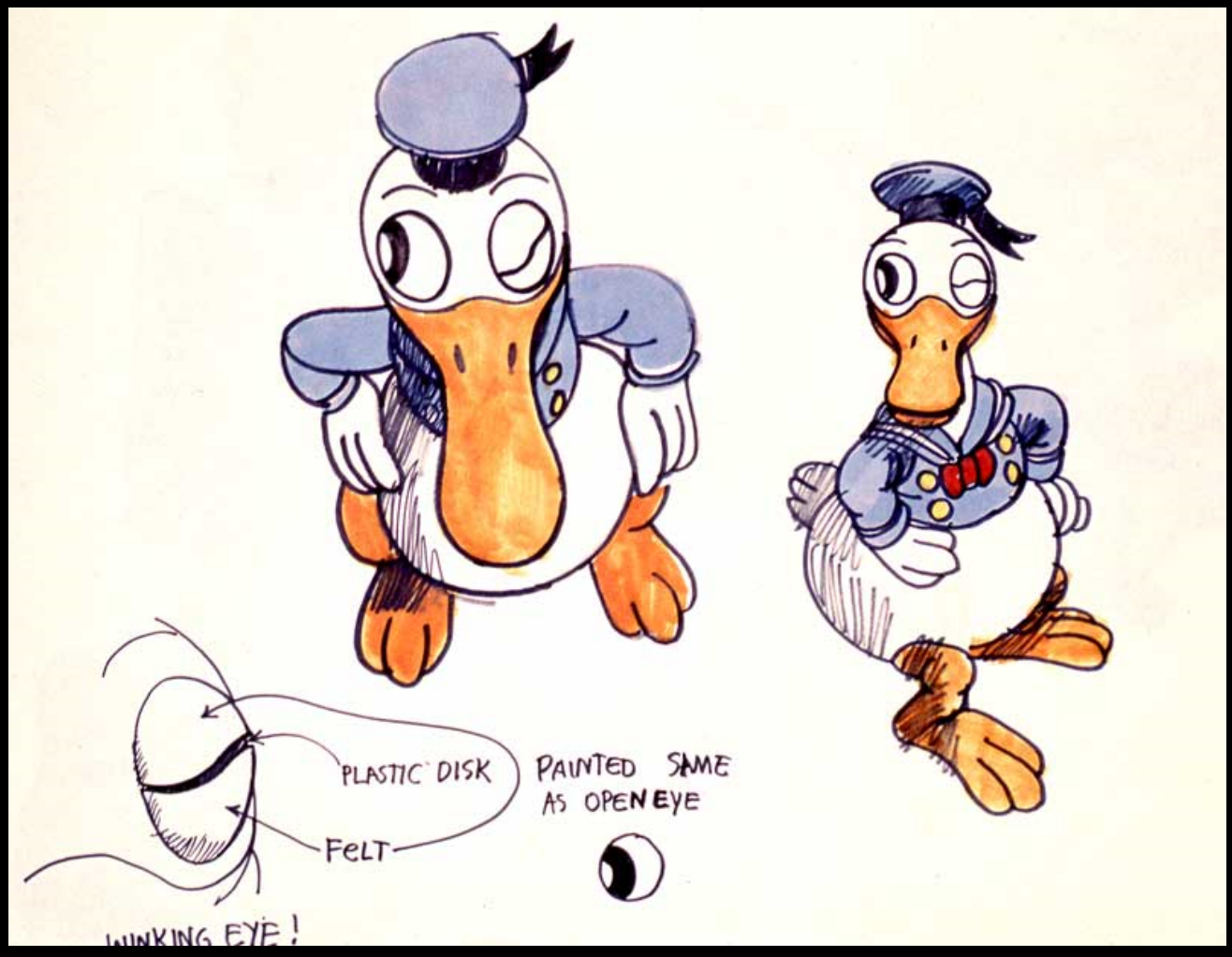
Soon I was corresponding in English with Mr. Segardo, as there were people at the factory, who could write and translate letters for him. And the artists on the staff, there, were so incredibly amazing that they thought nothing of making up a new idea just for the hell of it. They would gladly make up any new doll I asked for. Mr. Segardo said that I could send him drawings, and Lars would make to order any dolls I wanted, based upon my drawings.

Meanwhile, among the first group I had received there had been a fairly decent set of the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf. They were good, but not great. I envisioned creating drawings for a better set of these.

So, I sat down and made a series of full-color drawings. Among them, was a set of Three less Little Pigs, and a bigger Big Bad Wolf. This new Wolf would be complete with his spotted carpet bag, authentic movie colors, and shiny black patent leather hat.

And there were several views of an old style long billed Donald. Lars had never made a duck like this, before. All their Duck Family dolls, of which there were many, including all of Donald's relatives, who were very popular in Italy, had flat felt beaks.


BEAK OR "BILL" CAN BE PERMANENTLY SEWN CLOSED AND STUFFED.


PLASTIC DISK
FELT
PAINTED SAME AS OPEN EYE
WINKING EYE!

I also drew up a much better version of Horace and Clarabelle, based in the fabulous endpapers in the “The Adventures of Mickey Mouse." Those were part of the second order. This time, I requested two of everything. I also added two more sets of “tipo vecchio”, and other stuff I can’t remember. Once more, I went to the shipping office, did all the paper work, and sent a money order.

Several months later, I got the notice that the shipment had arrived. This time, I had just bought my first car, a small Volkswagen station wagon, and drove it to the pier. There it was, an enormous wooden crate, much bigger than before, too big, perhaps, to fit into the car. The customs inspector asked me to open it. With his help, and a crowbar, we pried the cover off. He reached inside and pulled out a Clarabelle; took a look at her, and tossed her in again. Then he pulled out a Mickey Mouse, and said, “Hey! Aren’t these Disney characters? You can’t import these! It’s against the law!” I immediately went into shock! Then I made a BIG mistake!

The licensing division of Disney is located in New York City. I had visited their offices, a year or so before, where I met the art director, Lou Lispi. He was a fabulous artist. Lou had been there since the 1930s, and designed the famous Lionel Circus Train.

I also met Al Konetzni. He was a "larger than life" kind of guy with an outgoing personality. He was the merchandising manager, and also an artist, who had designed some of the merchandise from the 1950s, stuff from the Mickey Mouse Club era. Now, he was the one that dealt with licensors, and cut the deals with toy companies, like Colorforms

Al was both fascinated and enraged that collectors were paying relatively big bucks for things that, in his day, sold for pennies. He loudly complained about antique dealers, and wracked his brain trying to figure out how Disney could, either get a piece of that action, or put a stop to it! Nonetheless, Al had been very friendly to me, when Colorforms persuaded the Disney people to let me visit their New York office and photograph their 1930s Merchandise catalogues. So here I was, at the customs office, shaking with emotion, and, out of desperation, I decided to call "my buddy," Al Konetzni.

This proved to be the worst thing I could possibly have done. I called him, right there, from a pay phone, and told him what was happening. He immediately flew into a rage, and this is what he yelled at me: "Wait a minute! You can't do that. You can't order those dolls! It's against the law!" He was steaming! "Just walk away and leave them!" He was screaming! "I don't think Lars even has the license to sell those dolls in the United States! I'm going to check this out!" He was about to burst a blood vessel; my heart was, also, breaking.

So I left the crate sitting there, and went home, without the dolls. There was nothing I could do about it……

Except turn to my friend and employer, Harry Kislevitz, the owner and originator of Colorforms, and ask if he could help me. Harry was amazing. He once telephoned Pablo Picasso and asked, "Pablo, I like the baby you have in such and such a painting, Could I manufacturer it as a doll?" There was nothing that he couldn't or wouldn't do, over the telephone. So, we worked out a scheme, in which he would contact the customs people, tell them that he was opening a toy museum, and assure them that the dolls were never intended to be sold, and that they were here for his museum exhibit only. In exchange for this, I agreed to give Harry half the dolls. And that's exactly what happened. It took about six to eight weeks before everything was cleared. The Colorforms van, once more, picked up a crate from customs, and Harry got a set of "tipo vecchio", the other Big Bad Wolf, the Three Little Pigs, the new "old" Horace and Clarabelle, and the second Donald Duck.

From what I was later able to piece together, Al Konetzni, who never learned what happened to my dolls, contacted Lars and the sacred the "merde" out of Mr. Segardo. He frightened him to the point that, in the future, Lars would not sell Disney dolls to Americans, even if they went to Italy in person to get them. So, that was basically the end of Lars dolls coming to this country. My enthusiasm for them them had resulted in their banishment.

Meanwhile, a year passed, and David Smith, the archivist at Disney Studios sold John Fawcett a mint unpunched Mickey Mouse Waddle Book for $50. And I was desperate to get it. John was open to a trade. So I went to Harry Kislevitz, and traded him a Mickey Radio and a Betty Boop Doll for the other half of the Lars dolls. Then I traded all the dolls to John for his Waddle Book, which, by then, he had punched out! Now John had duplicates of all the Lars dolls that I had, and others that I didn't. And that is the end of this part of the story.

Here are some rather blurry photos of the Lars Dolls as they were displayed at the Bamberger's Show, in 1973. The Wolf and Three Pigs were in a built in room devider showcase.

The pair of Mickey and Minnie, tipo vecchio, got their own custom made showcase, as well.

The whole line up of basic Disney Characters had a big showcase of their own.

Over the years, John's dolls got dirtier, as they sat around his studio, gathering dust. Until, at last, he decided to sell them. Some mercenary wheeler-dealer types in California bought them, and, overnight, the prices began to rise "through the roof", as the expression goes. The inferior Horace and Clarabelle, for instance, were auctioned for $13,000 dollars. Gulp! Eventually, John sold them all. I later saw my Donald Duck, one of the only two in existence, misrepresented in an auction, claiming it was old. It went for a small fortune. Time and again, when I have seen Lars dolls auctioned, they turned out to be the ones I, either, designed, or owned.

Here is my Donald, by the way. He came out very nice.

And here is the Big Bad Wolf, looking big and bad, and the Three Little Piggies looking big and fat, along with the very rare and awesome Kruger Big Bad Wolf doll, from the 1930s, looking small and scared

This large showcase, now, resides in the hall. It certainly contains a lot of history. The first pair of Mickey and Minnie I got from Bloomingdale's, and repainted their eyes, are here. Goofy and Pluto from the first shipment, are here as well, and, finally, Horace, Clarabelle and Donald, based on my drawings. Thank Goodness for this showcase! Without it, these dolls would be covered in plastic bags, again, or sold; thrown out into the cold cruel World, to be, eventually, auctioned off, as old.

And, Finally, here are Mickey and Minnie, “tipo vecchio.” They really are quite wonderful! They still stand, in the same showcase I posed them in, on the fifth floor of Bamberger’s Department Store, in 1973. Behind them, by the way, is a drawing by John Fawcett. More of his art is, just, three pages away.

A couple of years later, in a garden store in The Garden State, New Jersey, I stumbled across a selection of “tipo vecchio” Mickey and Minnies! Among them were two pairs of huge ones, nearly four feet tall. Apparently Lars had produced the dolls I had suggested, after all. Here they were, in person, the giant dolls that I had tried to talk Mr. Segardo into doing, sitting at that New York bar, several years before!

They were not cheap. Nonetheless, I bought both pairs. I still have one set today. Their original plastic bags are too ugly to look at, and I have no place to put a showcase, big enough to keep them clean. So to protect them from getting dirty, I keep them stored away. Along with the two sets of the huge dolls, the store also had a variety of smaller sizes, none of which were as large as the original 22 inch ones. I have often wondered how this load of dolls ever got through customs. I never saw the original 22” size again. The three sets that I obtained, and Ward's Mickey doll I saw on TV are the only ones I know of.

Occasionally, in the years that followed, I would still see Lars dolls, here and there, mostly Tom and Jerry, seldom Disney. Over time, it became apparent that the quality of what Lars was producing was deteriorating. The craftsmanship was always terrific, but the material, itself, became cheaper and cheaper. The original dolls that I got, during those first few years, were made entirely of thick delicious felt. But as time went by, the felt was replaced by synthetic fabrics.

A few years ago, I heard that Lars went out of business.

THE WORLD UPSTAIRS

“The World Upstairs” is more than just a way of saying “everything I overlooked, or failed to include, up till now.” This is destined to be the biggest page of all. There’s lots of showcases I already photographed that didn’t fit into any category, and others that didn’t go before the camera, yet. Here, too, are all the bookcases, cupboards, shelves, and drawers, that hold more, and more, and more.

Should I offer an overview of the whole place, or take it, case by case? There are some important showcases here, hiding in plain view. So I’ll start by going through them, one by one. To begin: here is an area that's been ignored, the corner by the Barber Chair. Before I got the computer, this was my domain. This chair was a gift from Herbert Kohl, a friend we knew in Paris. When we all moved to NYC. Herb found this in his newly rented apartment that was formerly a beauty parlor. And he gave it to us, when we were living in the empty loft on 26th street. Over the years, I have done all my best thinking, and break-taking on this chair. From this lofty perch, I could study the multitude of projects that, one after another, occupied my desk, just a dozen feet away. It provided me perspective on whatever I was working on. This barber chair was like my second home. All the creative endeavors of my life, every toy and doll design, beginning with the Outer Space Men, and all the Colorforms I made, were conceived and overseen, from this barber chair. I did everything, but have a haircut, there.

So, this is as good a place as any to begin. Here, on the corner, beside the barber chair, are three showcases that we haven’t looked at yet, and there is another, directly behind it, that we also haven’t seen.

In the bottom corner case, is something absolutely unique. If another like it has survived, I would certainly be surprised. I got this from my friend Kenny Chapman, a successful stock broker, who become an inspired "Picker." He kept Ted Hake's Auctions supplied, for years. On occasion, he would show me things, minutes after he discovered them, at Brimfield, on secret excursions to his car. One time, there in the back trunk, was this incredible Easter Display. This unit has been pictured in Playthings Magazine, in an ad that made it clear that it was designed to be used with this Kruger Donald Duck doll, as part of the display. So here they are, united. My best Kruger Donald is in place. And I had a wonderful time, dying eggs to decorate with these fabulous PAAS Cut-outs that transform twenty Easter eggs into the most popular Disney Characters of their day, Mickey and his buddies, including, the Three Pigs, and others from the Silly Symphonies. They are a veritable Who's Who of Disney, at their best moment in time. This inconspicuous corner cabinet contains a treasure that I feel it's safe to speculate, might be one of a kind.

Moving up a step, we find a showcase that contains some more toys made of celluloid, some of which, like the celluloid Mickey Boxers from Australia, are quite unique. There was a version also made for distribution in the USA that is one of the few celluloid toys that eluded me. But this version from "Down Under" is the only one like it I've heard about, or seen. Here, also, is a selection of freestanding celluloid figures. That Pluto, on the side, is a favorite, one that might impress, only, me. He is extraordinary, solely, because of what isn't there. This is the only time I've seen him not attached to a wind up toy. He's quite a good looking guy. Here, too, is a colorful set of picture cubes, as well as three wooden mice, two Mickeys and a Minnie on skis, a pair of pretty sand pails, and an interesting porcelain condiment set, featuring Minnie and two salt and pepper Mickeys.

Now up to the top shelf! There are some treasures here; I mean seriously! First of all, is the Second version of the French Cast Iron Mickey Bank. Obviously, the company that made the First version, which was the item that got me started on collecting Mickey, was trying to get it “right,” in an effort to please Disney. The nose, formerly a cone, has been rounded off, and the eyes have become pie-cut. All the rest, thank goodness, remains the same. with one exception: this bank is fully marked with a very legible Disney Copyright.

In the very center of the showcase is one of the rarest Mickey Toys. I have heard of only one other. Its would-be seller was convinced his was the only one. It is the Wells Brimtoy Mickey Mouse auto. Figures from this toy have been incorporated in other items that Wells made, like Mickey, pushing a baby carriage, a toy located in the lower right hand corner of the big showcase, in the hall downstairs. But these small figures, Minnie, Pluto, and Mickey, wearing driving goggles, were created for this toy. There are touches, here, that are absolutely Brilliant. The patches on the tires are charming. But it is the amazing Mickey Radiator, winking, with headlights, forming his ears, that make this toy unique.

On either side, we find two wonderful wood jointed figures, made in Torrino Italy. They are made up of many many pieces. Mickey, with his original label, is very nice, but Donald is Extraordinary. If there were more Donalds as gorgeous as this one, this place might have been "Duck Heaven."

There is also a pair of French ceramic banks, a German pot metal Mickey, standing on a drum that is a bank, some tiny precious pot metal figures of Barney and Spark Plug, and then.....

The Bonzo Orchestra, a wonderful wooden Bonzo Band! I discovered these twelve figures, at Atlantic City, well displayed, in plain sight. The price made me walk away, and return a dozen times. In the end, as you can see, I bought them, and have always been so glad I did. Stuff, like this, all 12, all perfect, happens, only one time, in a lifetime.

Here, beside the chair, is a showcase full of Amazing things that sort of gets ignored. It is packed way too full with treasures, overlapping. From left to right, I'll mention some. The little wooden Mickey, carrying a brass ashtray is commercial, not homemade. Behind him, is a Mickey Mouse tin flute with the finger holes formed by the mouths of various characters. That Mickey car is very rare, with the original tiny Mickey in the rumble seat. Behind it, is a French jointed doll, and behind him, is a portrait of Mickey, carved into a lump of coal. Santa gave it to me, the year that I was Naughty! Then there are several excellent wooden dolls and toys. And, in the back of all of this, is a marvelous set of Mickey Mouse German Party "Crackers" for celebrating New Year's Eve .

In the center, is an amazing topless tin toy that does a belly dance, one of the first adult toys? In front of that, on the ledge, is an lyrical Mickey ornament, cut out of steel and made up of many levels, welded together. Mickey, pulling a cart, is one of the very first Mickey toys, circa 1930. Behind it, is a mint Lenci Mickey doll. There is a group of other things that include a radiator ornament, adapted into a lamp, a Mickey chocolate mold, several purses, and a book of handkerchiefs.

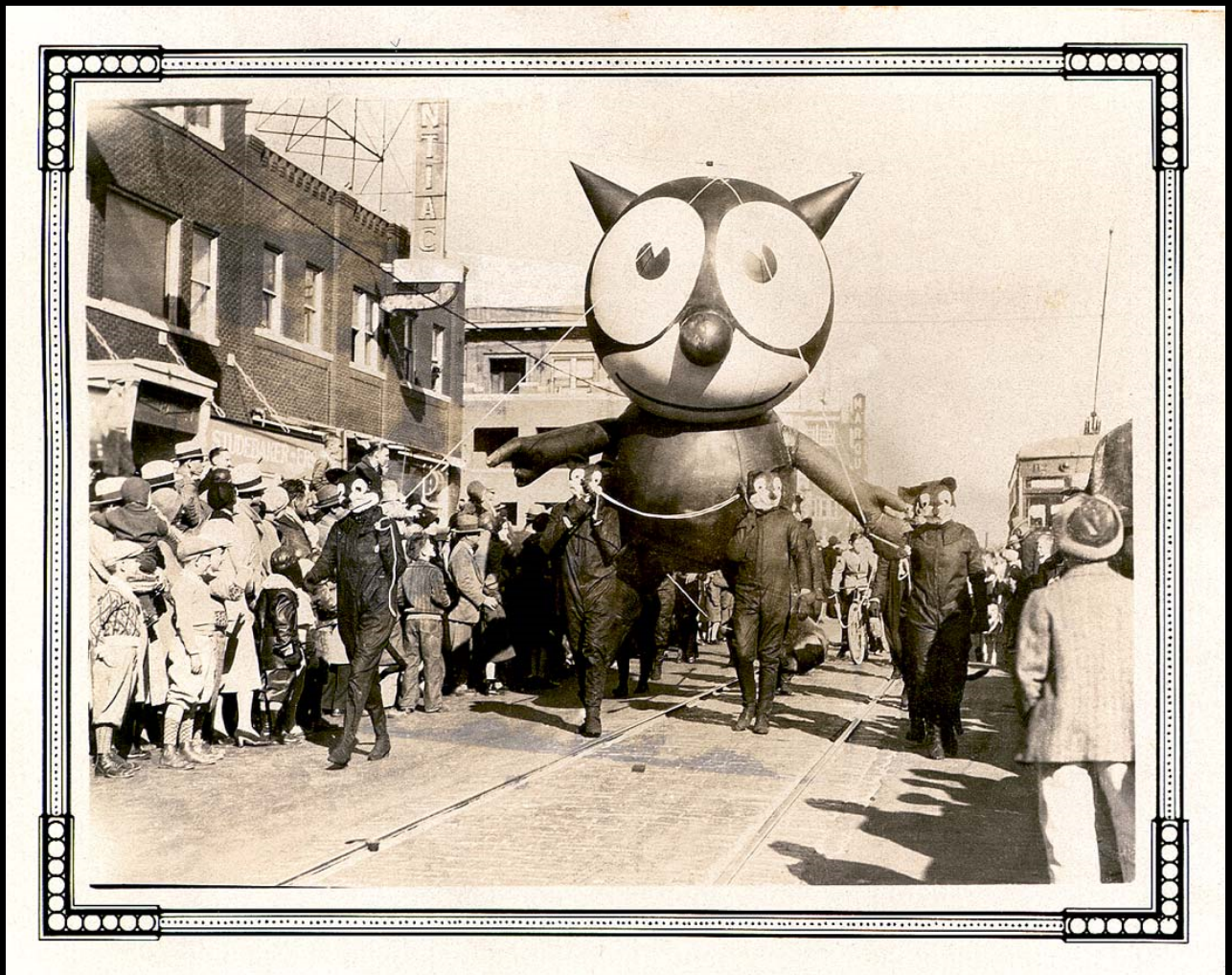
There are many other Mickey cases, up here, that we missed. This one is sort of Mickey Mouse and Felix mixed. This is another place, where too many great things are all crammed in together. In the upper corner, is a doll made by the Character Novelty Company. This is a special edition Mickey, made only for the 1939 World's Fair. You can see that, by that year, he had already lost his pie-cut eyes. Hanging from the ceiling, is a weird German Mickey Jumping Jack, covered in nasty looking rabbit fur, Yikes! In the center, is another of the very early dolls that Borgfeldt arranged to have made, right at the beginning of Mickey's history. And, behind that, is a perfect pair of dolls, sewn from the Charlotte Clark Simplicity patterns, along with the pattern, itself, and their special trunk. They are really too nice to be hidden.

Speaking of "hidden," hard to see is the Mickey gumball machine, with a perfect decal. There is also a tall drinking glass, advertising Mickey Beer! We talked about the canister for the Mickey gasmask, on the page of Mickey Masks.

A little lower down, in the case above, we see a cardboard figure, made by John Fawcett, and in front of that, a small black and white Mickey doll, holding a saxophone, made in Europe, and a Felix doll that is simple, but appealing. He, almost, looks homemade, but he is manufactured. Then is a 9" wood and composition Mickey, the rarer version, with yellow pants. He is admiring the first Felix doll, in like new condition, as well as a more fuzzy one, made by Chad Valley. There is also a composition Mickey candy container, with a nodding head, made in Germany, and two porcelain Mickey jars. Looking deeper, we find a Happy Knack Tea Set, and a perfect pair of “Ink-D-Cator” fountain Pens, in both variations.

I can’t resist a close up of this powerful face, a few deft brush strokes tell the story.

This doll reminds me of the Felix Parade Balloon, as it looms over the bystanders, on this ordinary small town street. Truly, this is a dreamlike vision. He is escorted by a entourage of pre-Mickey mice, and followed by a boy, riding a bike.



Now, we head around the corner, to where all the extra stuff ends up. Along the cabinets, at the top, are many cases that we missed, like this, that is dedicated to the kind of characters one might find in story books. Right in the center, is the original model for the Wild Things doll. I always liked this one best. So, after taking him apart to do the art, I sewed him back together again. The others, alas, are still in pieces. On the left, is "Annie Rooney," another doll sculpted by Joseph Kallus. He did the small bisque on the lower right, as well. Then comes "Uncle Wiggily", and, in front of him, are "Quacky Doodles" and "Danny Daddles," characters created by Jonny Gruelle. These wooden dolls were made by Schoenhut, Then is Ray Bolger, as the movie Scarecrow, and two Harrison Cady Bugs. Tucked into the middle of this group, is the Cady in the Hat, a snap-together model, toned and tinted by yours truly. On the right side, are some early dolls of Raggedy Ann and Andy, and their friend, "Uncle Clem." Here. too. are Dagwood and Alexander Bumstead, and a strange hand puppet baby, known as, "Buddy."

Below this case, we find one that is loaded with odds and ends, many of which relate to “Scrappy.” Here are a couple of Scrappy dolls, and the Scrappy theater, along with the display unit to advertise it. Here, too, are a pair of composition Dumbos, each with different ears. They were created by Kallus, of course. In person, they resemble Betty Boop, with big ears and a trunk.

Moving right along, here is an upper showcase, dominated by Siberling Rubber toys. This is the Original store display. These rubber toys have a limited lifespan. Thus, it is harder to keep the display filled, these days. There is also a variety of paper novelty noisemakers, made in Spain. And two of those nice Mickey dolls, one felt, one velvet, made in France.

Now, we pull back, to capture the entire showcase, and all the stuff, on the half. It is dominated by the big squared off Mickey, in the center, made by John Fawcett. And in the lower corners, are the Hestwood Marionettes, reproduced by Bob Baker. All the rest of this odd conglomeration of objects is old, except for a Lars Mickey, dressed as Steamboat Willie. The Donald Duck marionette was made by Pelham Puppets, in their heyday. On the right side, is a Mexican jointed Mickey, with a rather disjointed expression on his face. Front and center, the fabulous Mickey Mouse Comic Cookies box that forms a house, is the best item in the case.

In the far corner of the wall cases, is one that is sort of hard to get to. It is located underneath the Brownies and Kewpies. The upper one of the two shelves, is dominated by an early fuzzy Mickey doll, in black and white, made in Germany. He is surrounded by images, all made of soap. The stuff on the shelf below, is, pretty much, self-explanatory. The two Fisher price paddle toys, Donald and Pluto, are unusual, in that they are mint, with all the labels. The Wade Heath tea set is in a fabulous box. Like the Chein sand toy set, beside it. The cover folds back, and stands up. Both the Mickey Mouse and the Silly Symphonies tin lithographed flashlights are in the lower right hand corner.

I can't look at this showcase, without remembering a story about a dealer couple, who were prominent in the toy community, specializing in Comic toys. They had never visited my house, or, for that matter, ever sold me very much. Through a series of circumstances, involving a good friend from France, who went to Brimfield with them, they finally visited here, on the way back. While my friend, in awe, said he had to sit before the wall, downstairs, made dizzy by it all, and drink it in. The other two toured the entire house, in silence, stone faced, whispering to each other frequently, but without uttering a word, to me. They finally saw it all, not making a sound. And we, somehow, ended up upstairs, in the corner, by this obscure showcase. At last a reaction! The wife suddenly lit up like a Christmas tree, and, crowing like Mary Martin in Peter Pan, announced, in a sing song school yard tone, "We have something you don't have!"

"Oh?" I asked, "What is that?"

She trumpeted triumphantly, "We have the battery to that flashlight!"

I replied, "So do I. It's inside!"

There is one other compartment on this wall unit that we should see; It features art supplies . The totality of the case is, more or less, filled up with the large spectacular Mickey Mouse Art Set, mint and complete with all its "stuff,"inside, including, crayons, paint, pictures to color, and full color coloring guides.

The most interesting thing about this Art Set is, actually, the insignificant looking green line drawings of Mickey and Minnie on the platform. These images are exquisite, very iconic, and well designed. They could have easily been used everywhere. Marx Bros. had an extensive line. Yet, they only appear here. The Minnie was used one other time on the side of the Marx Bros. Jack in the Box. But the Mickey was never used, as far as I have been able to discover, anywhere, but here. This set is rare. I just might be the only one aware of this image, today. This is the kind of visual trivia, with which I fill my head. I also managed to fill this space with enough copy to fit this photo of the Jack in the Box. It occupies a small showcase of its own, upstairs.

Also, in the Art Set showcase, is a selection of Mickey Coloring books, some of which are rare. The small one, on the left, was the first. This display case, is one of the only instances in Mouse Heaven that any artwork of my own appears. Those are the original quick sketched prototypes for a toy called “Peg Pals.” Mickey Minnie and Pluto were directly adapted from the Waddle Book. Here, also, are Boy Scout Bookends, and a matching lamp, with a Mickey Mouse light bulb.

Now, we come to an area that I don't know how to handle or explain. It has become so crowded it looks insane. It once looked great. All along the back, against a 25 foot long window that looks down into the other half of the house, was a lineup of all the early Disney pull toys by Fisher Price. They are still there, everything form the first Mickey push toy, to the windup Donald Duck. But, now, they are next to impossible to see, let alone dust. Here, too, is a whole village of Christmas Houses by Charles Ponstingl, and anything else that needed to sit on a surface that is horizontal. I'll take some photos. It reminds me of my father's garden, overgrown with excess.

Beneath this counter, on floor level, is a single isolated showcase, just the right size to hold the medium sized version of the Mickey Mouse folding Cardboard house. They even made one of these, big enough for kids to get in. Included here, are two pairs of color coordinated felt dolls, made by Borgfeldt, early on, as an alternative to the more expensive velvet ones, like Steiff, which they imported too. Carrying out the color theme, are a pair of orange and green Felix the cats, wrestling, and a celluloid Mickey baby rattle that matches the color scheme. Minnie holds some "Mickey Bucks;" they are also the right shade of green.

Now, to the cabinets, on the other side, where a few games are on display. Starting at the top, we find an English game based on the cartoon “Fishin’ Around,” and a set of French Mickeys to knock down. Their box translates into English as, “Mickey Goes to War!” There are also two of the earliest Mickey games, "Let Them All Come," in editions made in Germany and England. Then, there is an English cut out lamp, and a toy from the Three Caballero’s era called, “Sloties.” I used to love these, as a kid; the Disney gang reduced to simple abstract shapes. I have seen modern art, directly akin to this. Also, here, is a tin washing machine, one of the few examples of American Mickey imagery, lithographed on tin.

Moving down a shelf things get more interesting. I simply love that table tennis game. The cover is simple, honest, clean, and great. Check out the Mickey Ping-Pong ball! On either side, are several examples of items, using identical imagery, targets, tidily winks, and a shooting gallery that all look the same. On either end of the case, are the board and box for the English Ludo game.

On the top shelf, on the other side, is another Table Tennis game. This version is life size, the real thing! It is played on a Ping Pong table, and the net is cleverly made with cardboard cut-outs of Mickey and Minnie, who look like they are holding it. There are pictures of Mickey on the paddles, but alas no Mickey face on the ball. To the left of that, is the same game, made in Japan. And, on the right side, is the American made Ski Jump Game, as well as a really ugly Mickey Doll, made in Australia.

The next shelf down, is funny folks, which we have seen. And, then, we come to a shelf that has, among other things, art supplies and novelties, and many things that one does not often see, like the Mickey Mouse White Board in the box, without which it would be just a white piece of board. And a mini Mickey paint set, a Mickey Mouse bedtime candle, featuring a plaster holder, with a sleeping Mickey, and several pencil boxes, pencil holders, and bottle caps. In the front row, are three of the original school notebooks that were the first Mickey items Disney ever licensed. On the left, is a smaller version of the gummed Paper Cinema, and, on the right an extraordinary item, Mickey Mouse Gummed decorations. These are absolutely stunning! If I had more room on this huge page, I would scan and post them here.

Now, as we continue, I'll throw this in, just because it exists, my little Beatles collection, the new dolls and the old banks, and a nice Blue Meanie mask. The McFarlane figure sets are really great. I have all of them, saved, and stored away.

At one time, I had a lot of Japanese tin toys, Line Mar and the like, but I weeded them out, over the years, and kept only those that related to the circus. Here they are, in one show case, with the fabulous Cut-out Circus, designed by Vernon Grant, "The Singing Lady Circus." Like the Orphan Annie circus, it was a premium. I probably should have included these tin toys, along with Comic Windups, but this page, is for catching many things I missed. I sure don't mean to minimize them. Their design and ART is Great!

Last of all, on the way down the secret back stairs, is another big Mickey case. In it, are a few extraordinary things; extraordinary because they are so perishable, a tissue paper Mickey kite, an advertising sign for Mickey Mouse balloons, and a Mickey Balsa Airplane, complete, in the fragile original box, with and extra set of printed wings. This flew, powered by a rubber band. Here, too is a delightful wooden pull toy of Mickey riding on a bike, commercially made. Here too are several Marx bros. targets, and the Ring Toss game, as well as an original Mickey Mouse beanie.

Now, we have looked in nearly every nook and cranny, and, chances are, you still have no idea what it's like upstairs. So, if I can squeeze them in, without the computer going crazy, its fighting me over the size of this page, here are a few views of the entire room. Step right in, and look around! This should give you an idea how all the pieces of this giant jigsaw puzzle fit together. Each object has its proper place.

PNEUS
MICHELIN
VÉLO
SUPERMAN

PNEUS
MICHELIN
VÉLO
INVASION EARTH!

SUPERMAN
Action Target

LOOKIN' AROUND

At last, we've reached the Final Page! This website has come a long way, since I began it back in February. It was originally intended to be simply a photographic record, a quick attempt to place the camera in front of 125, or so, showcases, and then, walk away. Instead, I found that I couldn't resist commenting, along the way, and opening a drawer, or two, to fish out some related things. A lot of it was simply reminiscing. I apologize for that, and for the excessive use of first person pronouns. They are the the bad habit of an only child, who spent too much time alone, toiling over a drawing board, nearly every day, and, often, late into the night.

I might also attempt to explain and rationalize my habitual propensity to write, almost in rhyme, but, hopefully, not quite. It drives me crazy, too, sometimes. Atrocious spelling prevented me from attempting to write anything, all my life. The computer with its spell checking capability set the dormant writer in me free. But having spent my life doing artwork, where, hopefully, every element fits into the composition, all the while, awash in music, I have become addicted to melody. So looking for a word that's right, I tend to opt for one that that keeps the music flowing. It's like solving a crossword puzzle, one chooses the word that, seemingly, applies, and also sounds "right." Given several alternatives, I usually pick the one that rhymes. At times, it is annoying, and even gets embarrassing. But in the end, I just give in, and go with the flow.

Few visitors to Mouse Heaven are aware that there is a second, less conspicuous, collection, here. It is a fairly impressive one, consisting of tiny 25 watt spots, hidden bulbs of seven watts, and larger spotlights of every size, hundreds of them! No doubt, they're all illegal now. One day, the "Incandescence Police" will burst in here, arrest me for "incandescent exposure," and forcibly put out my lights. I better take a few more photographs, before they arrive.

So that's what this last page is all about, I plan to walk around the house, camera in hand, and click a few of the things that I left out, hit and miss, as they catch my eye. Looking back over the files of photos that I shot, over the course of this project, there are also some that I didn't have the room to squeeze in, or, inadvertently, forgot. Now is the time to include them, too.

On the wall of what I used to call the "livingroom", in the days when I did a great deal of what I considered "living" there, mostly parked in front of the TV, there is an amazing piece of History. It is darkening with age, and sinking deeper into the Sea of Lost Memory. While working on this website, I forgot that it was there. Dragging my tripod into that room, last night, I did the best I could to record an image of it, before if fades away. I don't remember how, or when, I got this thing, this captured moment of Comic History. I do know that I acquired it so many years ago that there was no such thing as Google. Thus, with a passing thought that I would, one day, explore it further, I hung it there to fade. My momentary good intentions faded too. Last night, it hit me like a ton of bricks! What an amazing document this is!

First of all, it is visually attractive, that's why I got it, in the first place, and that was the only reason. That, and the fact that it represented original art by nine Comic Artists, most of whose names and work I knew. And, I also knew that if I did some research, I would have been able to pin down the year that it was made, for there were clues. It was a time when Annie was still an Orphan. She remarks, "Gee I wish that nice funny man would adopt me!" That nice funny man, being a comedian," Joe Laurie," starring in a production called "Plain Jane." It was also a time when Skeezix was still a baby. Uncle Walt holds him aloft, to better see the photograph of Joe, telling him, "Yes sir, Skeezix, when he gets his makeup on, he looks even funnier."

WELL, HE MAY BE ALL O.K. BUT THESE PLAIN GIRLS DON'T MAKE ANY HIT WITH ME.
GAAR WILLIAMS
HERE, JOE, IS ONE OF CHESTER'S OLD SUITS - IT WILL JUST FIT YOU -
TO THE NEW MOVIE COMEDIAN
SIDNEY SMITH
THIS GUY, JOE LAURIE AINT BUT A PINT SIZE COMEDIAN BUT I'LL TELL TH' COCKEYED WORLD HE HANDED ME MORE LAUGHS THAN ANY GALLON OF TH' STUFF YOU GET NOW DAYS, BABY.
BUT WHO IS THIS "PLAIN JANE" YOU'VE BEEN RAVING ABOUT? ANSWER ME THAT, MOON MULLINS!!
Willard
YES SIR, SKEEZIX, WHEN HE GETS HIS MAKEUP ON HE LOOKS EVEN FUNNIER.
Wing
SHUT UP, JOE — I'M OVERLAUGHING MYSELF! I'LL HAVE TO GO TO A FUNERAL TOMORROW TO GET MY FACE BACK IN SHAPE!
GEE - I WISH THAT NICE FUNNY MAN WOULD ADOPT ME -
HAROLD GRAY
LISTEN, FLORADORA - WE'RE NOT GOIN' TO PARK HERE TONIGHT - I GOT TWO TICKETS FOR "PLAIN JANE" AN' THIS FELLA JOE LAURIE - HE'S SO FUNNY A GUY COULD TAKE HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW TO TH' SHOW AND STILL ENJOY IT!
ROGER - IT'S A LUCKY THING YOU ASKED ME TO GO 'CAUSE IF YOU HADN'T YOU'D BE LOOKING FOR SOME NEW PLACE TO STAY IN OFF THE STREETS NIGHTS!
SALS BOSTWICK
HO-HO-HAW-HAW! HAW! HA- HA-HA HO HEE HAN
JOE LAURIE IN PLAIN JANE
L'IL JOE WORRY
THIS AIN'T NO PLACE FOR ME!
QUEEN! THIS IS A HEAVY DATE NIGHT - WHICH SHOW WOULD Y'LIKE T'SEE?
OH! TAKE ME TO SEE JOE LAURIE IN PLAIN JANE AND I'LL BE YOUR SLIM PRINCESS FOR LIFE AND I DON'T MEAN PERHAPS
CARL ED

Joe's photograph is posted in the middle. In this comic world of two dimensions, that is the same as being there, in person. Rudy Neb sits in the crook of Joe's elbow and exclaims, "Shut up, Joe - I'm overlaughing myself! I'll have to go to a funeral tomorrow to get my face back in shape!" Here, is also Andy Gump, looking very early, as well as Moon Mullins, Harold Teen, and images by three other artists, whose names I did not know. Each artist contributed original art to what appears to be a visual "roast," or tribute to the Man in the photo.

Last night I looked him up on Google. According to The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville: "JOE LAURIE, JR. 1892 - 1954, Joe Laurie's vaudeville career as a comedian was a lengthy one but it's relatively unimportant!" It goes on to damn him with faint praise. He starred in a show called "Plain Jane" that played in New York, from March to October of 1924. That is the year that Orphan Annie began. Was she so well-known as to be included on this document, just a few months after she was created? Another scrap of newspaper I discovered on Google tells that "Plain Jane" played in Chicago, the following year, 1925.

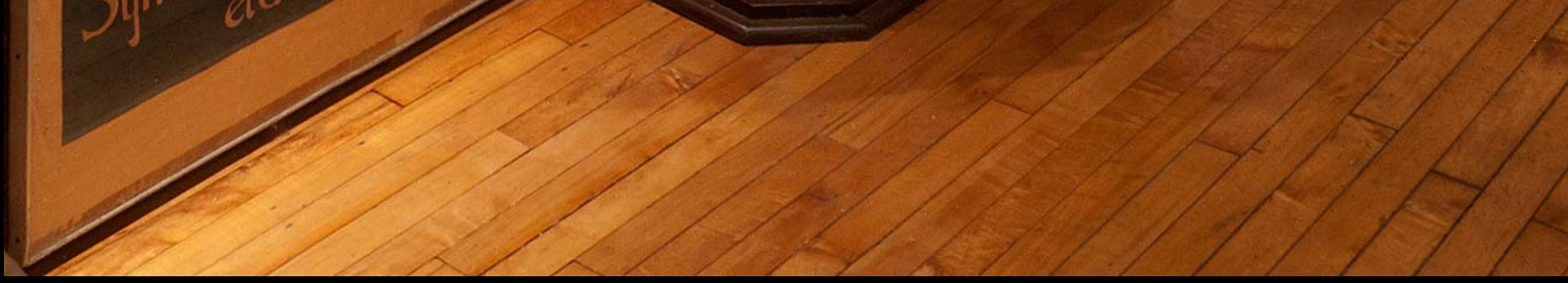
That explains it, all these artists were there! All were living in Chicago, that year, and working for the Chicago Tribune. Were they offered free tickets to the show? And afterwards, generated this gathering of history, all on one amazing page? Among the few, whose names I didn't recognize, Garr Williams can be found, on Wikipedia. He had a long career in little-known comic strips and illustration, but never made it to a place a guy like me would know. Sals Bostwick came to Chicago to work with Frank King. He was doing a Sunday Strip called "Behave Yourself" at the Tribune, the year that he drew this. He died of appendicitis a few years later, at the young age of 27. The man on the bottom, whose signature I can't make out, remains a mystery. But one that were I a younger man, I would pursue. This amazing document is a doorway to the World of Comic Artists, as the great ones gathered in Chicago, on the staff of the Chicago Tribune in 1925. I wish I had the time, and energy, and appetite to open that door wide. I just peeked through the keyhole, last night.

Oh, would that I could live in Paris, again, as it was in 1958, that is. I return there frequently, in memory. This poster brings some mixed ones back to me. One day, my friends Bob and Verta went away for a few days. When they returned, Verta told me they had gotten married. This turned out to be her idea of a joke, born out of wishful thinking. Eventually, they did get married, by the way, back in the USA. Like an idiot, I believed it, and went out to buy them a wedding present. I didn't have much money. It was a sacrifice. There was a wonderful shop that sold old posters, really old ones, Alphonse Mucha, Toulouse Lautrec, and advertising from the Turn of the Century, and they were inexpensive. I discovered this gorgeous two sheet flight of fantasy that represents the Devil seducing Happiness. It certainly seduced me. It advertises a Gala Ball, celebrating Judi-Gras on the 14th of February, 1901. It was still folded, just as it had been, on the day that it was printed, and it cost the equivalent of five dollars. That, to me, was a lot of money. In a moment of mad extravagance, I not only bought it for them, I bought one for myself, as well. The store happened to have two.

When I gave my friends the wedding present, it proved to be most embarrassing, as Bob knew nothing about "the marriage," and thus, the truth came out. What to do, in such an awkward situation? I gave them the gift, anyway.

Living in the old loft in Manhattan, a year later, I got an 8 foot piece of Plexiglas, a sheet of plywood and some aluminum bathroom molding, and "framed" my poster, as you see it, here. I have had to photograph this from an angle, because the ceiling lights glare on it, directly.

SALLES DU GRAND THEATRE du
BAL DE L'OPÉRA
MARDI GRAS
14 FEVRIER 1901
ORCHESTRE
Léon Bérot
Décoration
de Sépé
Syndicat de la boucherie
et de la charcuterie

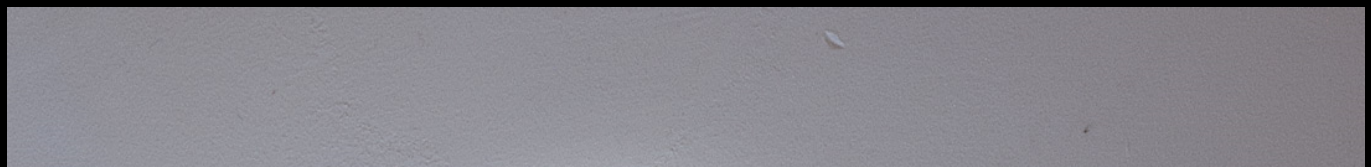


Talk about misunderstandings! One day, Bob who was living in New York too, confessed how angry that poster made him feel. He was convinced that I had hung it there to taunt him with the the fact that he had left it in France! He didn't realize that I had a second poster. And probably didn't believe me, when I told him this one wasn't his. It seems that Bob and Verta had placed their folded poster, on top of a tall armoire in their room, and forgot that it was there.

When Bob and Verta left Paris, Eunice took over their room, at number 9 Rue Git le Coeur. Naturally, she never thought of looking on top of the 7 foot tall armoire. Who would? But Bob assumed that she had found their poster, and I framed it to "rub it in." This sure qualifies for the "no good deed goes unpunished" category! Eunice and I both love this poster. She said to me, last night, as I was photographing it, "I wonder what became of the other one?" "The Beat Hotel" has, since, become a landmark. Its contents are, now, enshrined in a museum. Wouldn't it be ironic if it were there?

Many, many, years ago, when we were still living in New York City, I bought an amazing Christmas gift for Eunice. It is made of wax, and is remarkable, remarkably beautiful! Remarkable, also, is the fact that it has survived intact, over a hundred years. Thank God, we had the good sense to keep her in a showcase. The color of her lavender ribbons has faded, but the figure was ivory white to begin with, and she looks very much the way she always did. This is from the Art Nouveau Era, obviously, made in France. She has that "je ne sait quoi" touch of Turn of the Century French Magic, both provocative and slightly comic. Her beauty is elusive and fragile, both in form and material. And the fact that she has neither arms, nor legs, and is just a torso, sounds unsettling, when described in words, but seen, in person, might not even cross your mind. It is intrinsic to her design. What you will notice is her luscious pink lips and her beautiful eyes, looking at you, from deep in shadow, unmistakably, alive.

Attempting to photograph her, yesterday, I discovered that the Plexiglas showcase had come unglued, and was ready to collapse, and take with it, the heavy lamp that sits on top. So, I immediately removed the Plexiglas, and attempted to repair it. This was not how I had intended to spend the afternoon. While the glue was setting, so was the sun, and a ray of sunlight came through the window to illuminate her from behind. My camera, on a tripod, happened to be standing there. Thus, I seized the opportunity to capture this exquisite moment, as she glowed, radiant, in the evening sunlight, delicate and beautiful.



I put the showcase back in place, and set the lamp on top, again, along with these two delightful Schaffer Vater Bottles, in which the carefree young lady's legs are actually the stoppers. As the camera was already positioned there, I photographed this magic lamp that we acquired in a local auction. It's not really what one might consider a part of the collection, but the sight of it, a fountain of golden iridescence, has always pleased me. While I'm in my wife's domain, let's see what other treasures I can find.

This room is full of memories. Sitting in the far corner of a coffee table, are a pair of Dresden Figurines. These were inherited from my mother, but they were actually my father's taste. He collected a smattering of antiques, in his day. These two elegant French ladies are as out of place, here, in this world of Comic Characters, as I had been, in the World that I grew up in, the once great city of Detroit, Michigan, in the 1940s. These sat on top of the piano, in that room that was never lived in, except on holidays, ironically called, the living room! Every family we knew had a piano, like ours. And, like ours, too, most were never used. When I was very young, my parents provided piano lessons. I was hopeless at it, but I clearly remember, banging away, while, all the while, studying every minute detail and nuance of these two figurines, the dial on one's watch, the stripes on the other's dress; these things left an imprint on my memory. Evoking the spirit of Marie Antoinette, they spoke to me. "Let them eat cake!" they said. So, I headed out to the kitchen, and did!

Across the room, are two other ladies. These are of a later date. On second thought, perhaps, they are not "ladies!" These two alluring beauties are made of celluloid. They are studded, here and there, with rhinestones. Light as a feather, they are vulnerable to the slightest breeze.

It's time to take a bathroom break! When we first moved here, I was doing all the carpentry myself. I had already completed the Formica bathroom, all except the cabinet drawers, when Bill Maxwell, my savior, who like that other savior, better known, was also a carpenter, came into my life. And I never did carpentry again. But, before he got here, I made this: Tucked into a secret corner, visible, only when one is entering the bath, is a small showcase. At the time, I thought it would be the way I would display the entire collection, in cases large and small, set into walls, throughout the house. Who knew, then, how big the task and the collection would become? Unscrewing Plexiglas proved to be a pain in the ass. Therefore, the stuff that I stuffed in here, when this was built, 40 years ago, has never been changed or rearranged.

These figures with removable figleaves, and trick features that I will leave to your imagination, an amazing head, cleverly formed of naked ladies, carved in Japan, out of something that resembles ivory, and a bevy of German bisque bathing beauties. There is also an amazing match safe, in the form of a dragon, and an Art Nouveau inkwell, with a demon face on the brass lid.

And while we are in the bathroom, we mustn't miss this gorgeous vase. It represents a mermaid, teasing a water sprite. Eunice discovered this at the Stormville airport Flea Market. She did well! It is marked GH on the bottom. This did not photograph nicely, under the fluorescent bathroom lights, so I am taking it upstairs to photograph it properly, on my desk. I really lo

Back in Eunice's room, again, here is the odious chair that was the bane of my existence, when I was growing up. As a lawyer, (he made his living in real-estate) my father had only one client, a tiny Philipino woman, named, Mrs. Bukassis. I dreaded hearing the sound of her name mentioned, as every time she visited, she brought with her, as payment for his services, atrocious antiques, each one more horrible than the last. One was a frightening Dresden image of a pasha studded in tiny golden dots. It sat cross-legged on a glass dome covered pedestal in the hallway, and nodded its mysterious head and waved a fan, whenever I walked past. Another offering was a flock of stuffed birds, with eyes that were not glass, but, instead, were like tiny dried up raisins. Posed on branches beneath half a dozen domes of glass, they provided a home for hundreds of tiny vermin, visible, on close inspection. As terrible as these things seemed to be, to me, by far, the worst thing was this chair!

The legend that Mrs. Bukassis told was that it was found in King Tut's Tomb! In fact, my parents referred to the chair, itself, as "King Tut!" Its presence in our home completely freaked me out. If you are wondering why I found it so frightening, I might point out, it had two heads and four human feet, with which it could chase me in my dreams, and did! I won't go into all the gory details, except to say, my mother set my beloved teddy bear on it, one day, and I never touched that bear again.

When my mother sold the contents of the house, she told me that I could choose one thing. At 21, some inner motive, certainly a complex one, compelled me to pick this chair. So here it sits, with inlay of exotic woods and precious ivory, I, now, see it as an object of elusive beauty that, at the same time, is still a little scary. If it were to turn its heads and roll its terrible eyes at me, again, as it once did, when I was “sick in bed,” it would not surprise me.

Although it didn’t really come from King Tut’s tomb, it is made in the image of similar chairs that did. In the era when the tomb was opened, this image actually became a toy. I kid you not! The pages of Playthings Magazine, from those early years, reveal that it was called the “Tut Pup!” It stands in front of another turn of the Century affiche, advertising a Parisian shadow theater that was popular in the days, before there were moving pictures. Also, on the wall, are two early animation drawings. One is Clarabelle Cow, and her significant udder, in the days before she wore a dress, and the other is Minnie Mouse, searching for something she stashed in her stocking.

TOUS LES SOIRS A 9 HEURES
Musée Grévin
AU
DAHOMEY
Ombres
DE LOUIS MORIN

On the wall behind the TV, which was, once, a place that I could hang drawings that I did, 45 years ago, until Eunice banished them from the room....

There remain some original Disney animation drawings, from the treasure trove of Burt Gilette. Most remarkable, among them, are these four early images by Ub Iwerks. These were from the first Mickey Mouse art, issued by the Disney Studio, poses of Mickey, intended to be instantly iconic, and used on publicity and early products. Anyone familiar with the earliest Mickey Imagery will recognize these.

Across the room, there hangs a theater poster, from a Turn of the Century Broadway production, starring the Katzenjammer Kids. Anybody who was somebody in the world of Comic Characters, Buster Brown, Happy Hooligan, Little Nemo, Jiggs and Maggie, Foxy Grandpa, the list goes on and on, appeared on Broadway, in those early days.

There is another fabulous poster that we should see, before we go upstairs. I photographed it, several weeks ago, while standing on a ladder. It hangs along the facade of the balcony, overlooking the big room. It was another generous gift from Kenneth Anger. Kenneth always manages to stay afloat, buoyed up by his talent, and notoriety. He sails across the sea of life, sometimes, nearly sinking, but often walking god-like on the surface of the water, wined and dined, the whole World over. Years ago, J. Paul Getty gave him a hundred thousand dollars to make the film, “Mouse Heaven.” Kenneth immediately went on a spending spree. He took Eunice on a trip to Washington DC, where they stayed at the Watergate hotel, and he over tipped everyone, outrageously. And to celebrate the upcoming making of “Mouse Heaven,” he bought this fabulous German poster for me. Needless to say, the film didn’t get made. Years later, Getty endowed a second attempt, this time, less handsomely, but with enough to enable Kenneth to, finally, take it seriously, and make the movie, after which this website is named.

This was the standard Micky Maus stock movie poster that was used in the early 1930s, throughout Germany. It had a place for the theater owner to write in the name of the cartoon, playing, currently. This particular poster has been adapted to announce a lecture by a man named, Jury Rony, on the subject of “Micky Maus and Other Trickfilms,” the theme being “The Made Film.” The year figures out to be 1932. I love these stark and direct images of Mickey and Minnie.

This is as good a time as any, to go back upstairs to revisit the spectacular Mickey Mouse Automaton that we first glimpsed, on the Yellow Kid page. I'll take you there by secret stairway. There's something I'd like you to see, on the way. Half way up this hidden flight of stairs that was the only way to get up here, before the spiral staircase came, there is an open showcase that no one, including me, ever sees. Therefore, I never finished it, or wired it for electricity. In this place that daylight never enters, sits a magic jacket. Even in the semi-darkness, its elusive iridescence picks up every meager glimmer, and positively glows. Embroidered, on the back, in silken threads, is an awesome scene that represents two Cosmic Comic Deities from the USA, Popeye and Mickey Mouse. It depicts them, held aloft on clouds, as they fly past the pinnacle of Mount Fugi. There are dragons and tigers on the sleeves. This optimistic document, in which West meets East, in peace, was crafted in the early 1930s. Japan's Invasion of the USA was, still, half a dozen years away.

This awesome Automaton was another home run, by John Haley. Although, the item was found in England, it was made in Germany. One can tell from the papier mache, which on close examination, inside, turns out to be made up of layers of German newspapers. How old is he? He is very early, as evidenced by his lovely gloves with five fingers. This is not really a toy! It is more in the nature of an animated display. His clockwork mechanism is massive, and runs for a long time, on a single winding. His action is simply rocking, from side to side, while he raises his arms slightly. His eyes are an interesting variation. They are formed of celluloid, and the white circles represent the highlights. When his head tips, they roll from side to side. But they don't just lie there on the bottom. There is a celluloid track, inside each eye, that prevents that from happening. The track, which is invisible, keeps the white disks on a straight line, so they go from one side to the other, cleanly and quickly.

No one could ever know how deeply involved I am with the objects in this collection. In this instance, Mickey's pants needed to be replaced, and one silk covered button had to be recovered. Enough of the tattered old pants remained, to guide me in replicating the pattern. But, getting exactly the right silk for them, required a trip to NYC, and a daylong trek through the garment district, where, finally, with the old pants in hand, I found the perfect match, and, likewise, the right white to recover the one button. If you doubt how perfect that match is, just compare one button to the other.

As if that wasn't enough, one of the celluloid lenses on his eye was busted. I happen to have a marvelous set of comical disguise novelties, actually a couple of them. The stuff that they contain is fantastic. Each object, in its own way, is a work of art. In one set, there happened to be a celluloid monocle. The lens on it was identical to the one on Mickey's eye. This was, no doubt, exactly what the makers of the mouse used, in the first place, when they created him. Of course, I gladly sacrificed it to give Mickey a perfect new old eye. I relate this story, merely to shed some light on why I believe that Fate directs some of these things to me. Where else on Earth, would a treasure, as rare as this Mickey, find the perfect eye, waiting for him?

When we first saw this Mickey Mouse, it was the end of winter. Now it is the end of summer. The forest that was, then, covered in snow, and bleak, is rich and green. But there are already signs that autumn is arriving, and another winter will, soon, be here. So, without further ado, let me lift the showcase, and wind him up for you.

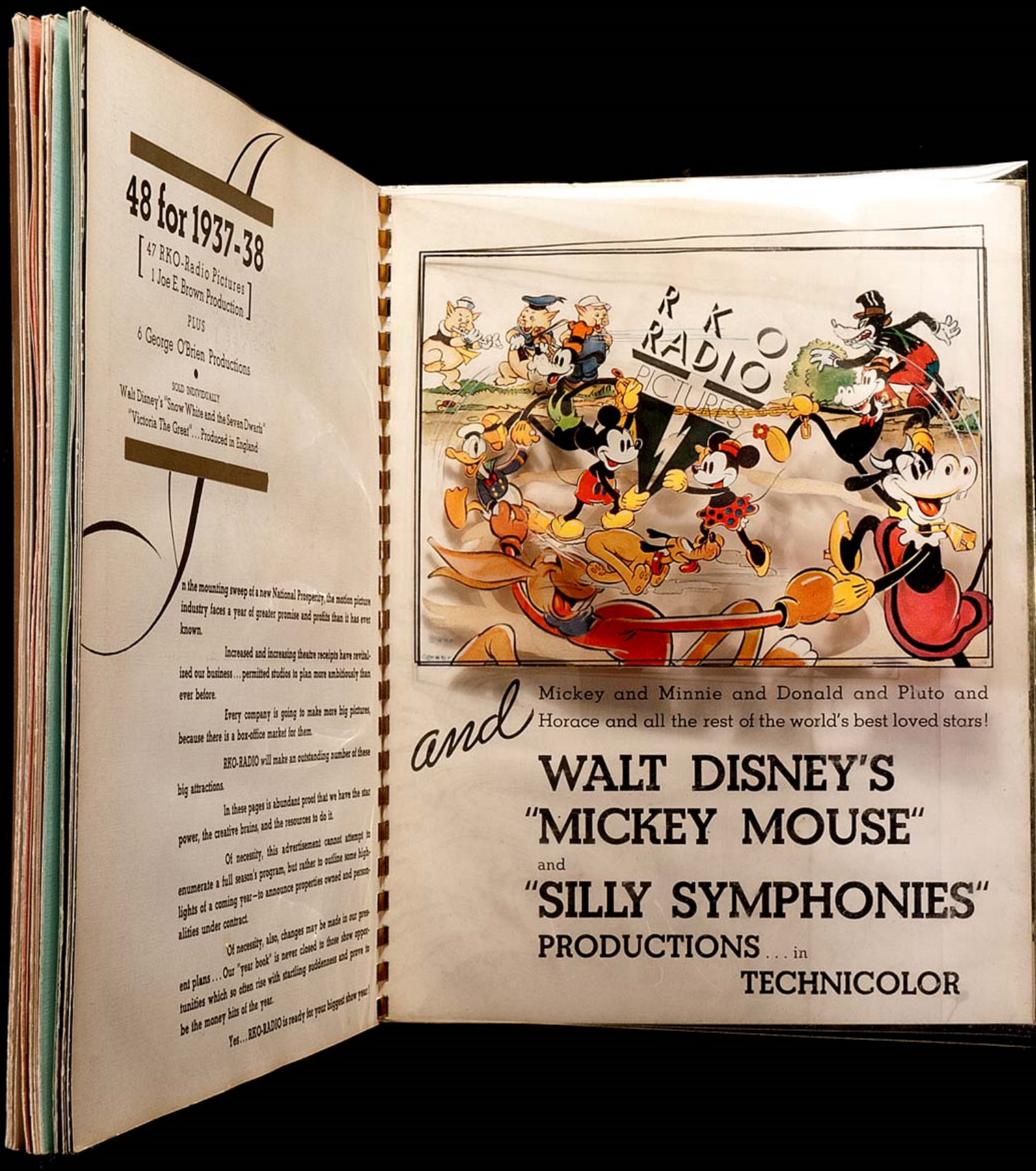
Moving stuff around, up here, I realized that I sure have a lot of Spark Plugs! They are tucked in everywhere. Among them, is one that is relatively rare. That is the mechanical walking version. It is very similar to the walking Felix toy, and made by the same company, "Wa-Gee-Walker." His body houses a complex mechanical mechanism that is intended to replicate a walking motion, when the toy is pulled along. This elaborate attempt was well intentioned, but works better in theory, or, perhaps, when it was new, than it does, now. Nonetheless, it is a rare Spark Plug. So, here is a small group of them, surrounding a most extraordinary, and huge, Barney Google doll.

Another rarity that Fate dealt out to me, arbitrarily, is this pair of figurines of Mickey and Minnie, circa 1940. Collectors of Brayton's Laguna Pottery have seen these pictured in the Kay Kamen Catalogues, or reprinted in the Munsey book. But, as of few years ago, no one I knew of had actually seen a pair. Many believe that that none, including the pair I claimed to have, exist. It's not unusual for things to appear in catalogues, and, then, never get made. If you have glanced at my history, as an aspiring toy inventor, you'll understand why I say that. Anyway, I am posting their picture, here, just to prove that they are real.

Here is a unique item that I photographed to include in “Hollywood.” But the page got just too big to squeeze it in! It is the Most Spectacular of Epic Motion Picture Pressbooks. If such publications competed for Academy Awards, this one would surely win the Oscar for 1937. It was produced by RKO Radio Pictures, and No expense was spared. This awesome object gives new meaning to the expression, “Every Trick In the Book!” Its makers really threw in everything, including the Kitsch-n sink! Throughout the pages of history, such fabled volumes as this have only been produced to grace the libraries of kings. Whether this outrageous volume ascends to the pinnacle of elegance, or is, instead, a ground-breaking achievement in the Chronicles of Kitsch, I’ll leave up to you.

Even its cover has a cover. It consists of a slab of heavy celluloid, 1/8 of an inch thick that is close as one could get to what we know as Plexiglas, today. But this is celluloid, and it has darkened to a glowing shade of gold, with age, and shrank considerably, causing its sharp edged metal hinge to buckle slightly. It is held in place by large brass bolts! The Celluloid is etched with the RKO logo, with some portions left clear, so one can see the second cover, one that does not match, or coordinate in any way, to show through. That second cover, equally heavy, is laminated in gold foil, embossed and printed. The entire volume is as audacious and ostentatious as Hollywood, itself, could be in 1937. America had left the Great Depression behind, and Happy days were here again.

Every page displays a different printer's trick, from glittering raised gold ink to actual glossy photographs, tipped in. But there is one complex page that may be the first, and, possibly, the last of its kind. That is the page devoted to Disney, Mickey Mouse, and the Silly Symphonies. It is made up of several elements, a background and two sheets of heavy celluloid, with Disney characters, printed on each. Altogether, they make up an entire layered scene, in a kind of cockeyed version of 3-D. It's a little difficult to figure out exactly what they were trying to achieve, as size relationships are mixed up and foreground objects are overlapped by more distant ones, and ... well, it has to be seen to be believed! I don't know if a photograph can begin to indicate the effect, but I will try to capture it. Whether it works, or not, is open to debate. But suffice it to say, like the entire pressbook, it was a "no expense spared" attempt to score a visual Knockout, at the expense of Good Taste.



There is one shelf, fairly low down, in an "Ikea" showcase, upstairs, that holds a group of tiny, but unique Mickey Mouse things. The way they are displayed leaves a lot to be desired, and renders them impossible to photograph effectively, but I will attempt it. When Ted Hake, who has seen everything, visited here, last year, this small group of inconspicuous objects stopped him in his tracks, "What's That?"

The objects that captured Ted's attention, are five small scenes, made in Japan. Each has its original plain brown box, sized individually to fit. They probably sold for ten cents each. Each box contains a tiny scene of Mickey doing unexpected things. The figures are hardly bigger than an inch, and their limbs consist of tiny wires. Each activity is abbreviated down to its bare essence. Everything that's necessary, is included, nothing less, nothing more. In the scene where Mickey is eating dinner, a fork is necessary to eat, so it is rendered, complete, with tiny wire prongs, no longer than a 16th of an inch.

These things are Amazing! They really should be photographed individually. Then, blown up to show what's really there! I'll try to capture what I can, in a single photo, and if that isn't adequate, I'll take a shot of each, close up. Looking at this photo, now, I realize, those in the background are shown actual size.

Here, Mickey stands beneath a streetlight, and serenades the passers by. There appears to be a lizard on the light! In the other scene, he directs traffic. Each of these is mounted on a base that is actually a slice of bamboo. There must have been endless varieties of these tiny visual Haiku.

After playing the piano, Mickey sits down to eat his dinner. He is using the one size fits all piano stool, in a remarkably similar room. The object he is about to cut into might be, either a plum pudding, or a meatloaf. Whatever it is, is clearly piping hot, as evidenced by the curling wisp of wire smoke that rises in the air, above it.

This one is a knockout, a masterpiece of brevity and excess complexity, at the same time. Check out the fallen combatant's Xed out eyes! The boxing ring, indicated by a few white lines, hand painted, on the background, continues out into 3 dinensionsl space, rendered by a few thin wires. Are those polka dots on the wall behind? In this tiny world of make-believe they represent the faces of the crowd. Notice how they deminish in size, as they go back farther from the ring.

That, above, is the final entry, on the final page. I'm not stopping because I've run out of stuff, or steam, but, simply, because this page has grown too big, and the web builder program, which is aptly named, "What You See Is What You Get," won't let me add another thing. So that's it! What you see, now, is what you get.

JOHN FAWCETT

Every once in a while, or maybe only once in a lifetime, one will form a friendship that will alter the course of their life. John Fawcett was such a friend, a fellow traveler on a road, where few have tread, with an artist's eye. Few, indeed, who could see what we were seeing! It's not like John and I hung out together. We were, for the most part, pen pals, as we lived so far apart. Nor do we even cross each other's minds, that much, these days. John and his wife Jacqui are now living way up in Waldoboro Maine, where he has opened the "Maine Antique Toy and Art Museum." But John is ever present in Mouse Heaven, in the person of his art. John's big colorful paintings color this environment. They are the perfect complement to the collection, and cast a glow that is ever-present. Like the perfect background music, or fantastic lighting, John's paintings supply an element of Magic that prevents this conglomeration of ancient objects from appearing old and musty.

Upon entering the front door, one of the first sights that meets a visitor's eyes is this painting by John Fawcett. It is from the era of his work that I like best. It was a fascinating ride, over the years, watching his art progress.

In the beginning, his work was not as colorful as the painting above, but it was always beautiful.

I still remember, vividly, how our friendship began: In September 1968 a photograph of my, then, embarrassingly meager Mickey Mouse collection appeared in Life Magazine. This event changed my life in three important ways. First, from that time forward, I would think of myself as a "Mickey Mouse Collector," officially, which was something that, up until that time, I had been a little bit embarrassed to admit. Secondly, I got a phone call from Maurice Sendak, who became a lifelong friend. And last, but not least, I received a post card from John Fawcett.

John was an art teacher at the University of Connecticut. He had formerly worked in advertising in NYC, and hated the rat race. Ironically, he ended up chasing mice, instead. John and I became traveling companions on the road to discovering the "Golden Days of Yesteryear." Yesteryear, for him, had a lot to do with the imagery he loved as a kid. But, as an artist, his eye had drifted, from there, to include early Mickey. Yesteryear, for me, was all about a time before I was born, and wonders I was not around to see.

John and I were much alike, both, being only children, and, each, in our own way, enraptured with the World of Comic Characters. The roads we had been traveling were headed in the same direction, but on different paths. John, for years, had been gathering graphics and images of 1930s Mickey. He used them as a basis for his intricate drawings. He owned few, if any, comic toys. I, on the other hand, had several, but I didn't have a clue as to the existence of the amazing Disney Graphics that flourished in the 1930s that John was recreating, and celebrating, in his art. So, john opened this world of imagery to me, and, at the same time, he began collecting toys.

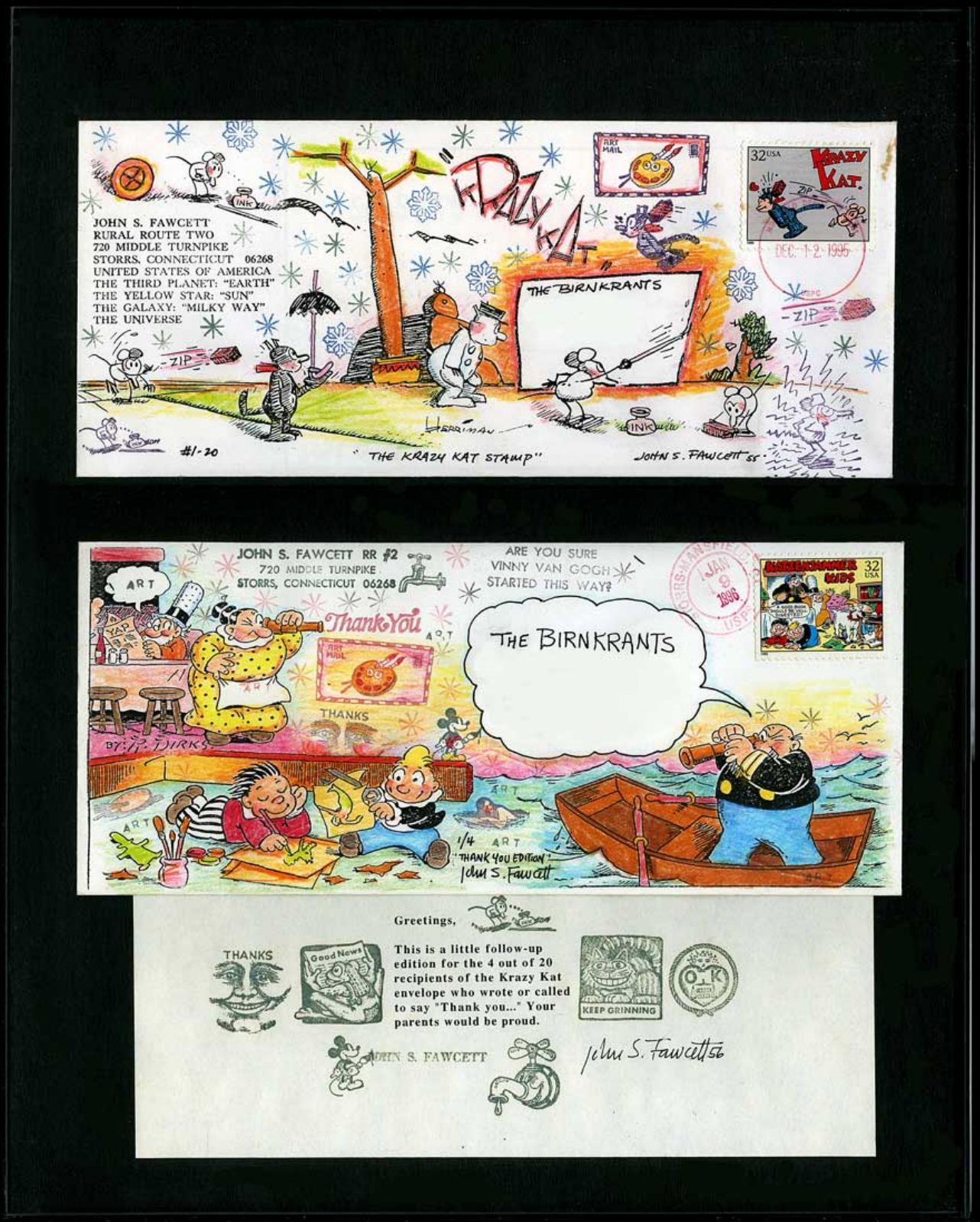
It was John who alerted me to Brimfield, which was a few miles from his house, in Storrs, and shared it with me. We went there, together, from the beginning, and thus, saw each other, at least, three times a year, with occasional visits, in between. We were like two little boys on an Easter Egg hunt, each scurrying to find the most exciting eggs. Secure in the belief that there were plenty there, we also shared. So, our mutual collections, and our friendship, grew.

One Christmas, the year was 1970, when my family and I had just moved to the country, and HATED it, John who, by the way, was one of the few people on Earth, who could read my handwriting, translated one of my letters, into this drawing, a combination Christmas card and Christmas present. The text, which was copied verbatim, and is, unfortunately, all true, weaves its way, throughout the art, in John's incredibly tiny lettering. Some of the lighter colored ink has faded and disappeared, over the years. Mercifully, the memories of the terrible times that it describes have faded, too.

John's drawings were always inhumanly complex, like tapestries woven with the pen. His penmanship was awesome, and, to this, he added an assortment of images from a huge array of artfully articulated rubber stamps, actual bits of printed matter, and photographs, all incorporated into a final drawing that, technically, might be considered a collage. His drawings were full to overflowing with content, both visual and verbal, the reflections of a mind chockfull of mental memorabilia. They were, in some respects, essays, as much as art. One could read them, like a book. There were frequent flashes of humor, both verbal and visual, ample evidence of John's ever present wit. And the art was always self-aware, it often commented on itself. And in the tradition of the crazy pictures on the wall, in comic strips, like Smokey Stover and Bringing Up Father, there was stuff happening everywhere. Little characters, running around, and "kibitzing." Of course, they all spoke for John, himself.

The average drawing began with some piece of preexisting imagery John liked, much of which was early Disney. This he would transfer to the paper, in light pencil. And, from there, he would build upon it, in India ink, layer upon layer, of complicated content, until a theme appeared. Often, it became a mixture of many messages, all woven together by John's incredible penmanship.

The Christmas card, above, of course, was just a lark. Are you ready for the "serious" stuff, yet? If you have not seen John's drawings before, you will be amazed. But first, let me show you one more example of both his Generosity, and his Compulsion to Create, nonstop! When a series of Comic Character stamps appeared, in 1996, John sat down and produced twenty inspired works of art, on envelopes, and sent them to his closest friends. I was honored to be included on that list. Would you believe that only four responded with words of thanks? And those, myself included, received a special Thank You envelope, thanking them for thanking him! So, here they both are, together, in a frame.



John had a fabulous collection of early publications, books and comic books, and these he adapted and used as a jumping off place for his art. This imagery was all new to me. And I embraced it, enthusiastically. And the early Disney imagery, as it appeared in John's drawings, drove me crazy. I never could decide if it was early Disney, or Johns treatment that I liked best. Was I reading through his deft and masterly penmanship and focusing on the underlying imagery? I had to admit that the more I liked the original Disney drawing John was using, the more I liked the piece of art he did.

Whatever might be the case, I simply loved his art. And, in spite of the fact that I was spending every cent I made on collecting, I managed to find some money to also purchase some of John's drawings.

John has an attribute, as an artist, that I greatly admire, and, alas, never possessed. Charles Ponstingl has it too. That is a driving need to create. Both of them do artwork, every day... for its own sake, for the love of doing it. The envelopes, above, are evidence of that constant outpouring. Throughout the years that John was teaching, he was still pumping out art, daily, and showing it at one of New York's most prestigious and influential galleries, "The OK Harris Gallery."

The gallery's dynamic owner, Ivan Karp, loved John's art, and purchased several of his works for his own collection. Karp gave John a show, whenever he was ready with a new offering of art. And the shows were successful, some, more so, than others. John, in a sense, was not a gallery owner's dream. The trouble with the art game, at least back then, was that when something you were doing sold, the gallery wanted you to do more of the same.

John, on the other hand, kept growing and exploring, and with each successive show, a different aspect of his art appeared.

Then, suddenly, John's work went through a transformation. The bookworm that once fed on literary connotation, suddenly, emerged as a Glorious Butterfly! But, before you see the effects of that transformation, you first must see John's drawings, the kind he did "seriously", and profusely, in the heyday of his draftsmanship.

The OK Harris Gallery, took a 100% mark up, so the artwork got expensive. But John would gladly sell me anything, at half price, which was full price, as far as his cut was concerned. This would be, after the show was over, so what was left, was leftovers. Then, one day, I was visiting, just before a show, and John had just completed four drawings that constituted a sort of set. They all had black borders in common. I fell in love with these, and john agreed to let me walk away with them, before they ever made it to the show, where, inevitably, they would have sold. Here are two of them below. The others are out of reach, but you have glimpsed one of them already, trapped between a showcase and the wall, behind the Lars Mickey and Minnie dolls.

MICKEY MOUSE BIRTHDAY PARTY
BOOGIE-WOOGIE BUGLE
VIA AIR MAIL
BANG the DRUM SLOWLY
IVAN KARP'S ART DREAM
O.K. HARRIS
MICKEY TAKE FIVE
DAVE BRUBECK
"MICKEY IS NOT A MOUSE. MICKEY IS GREAT ART" NUMBER FOUR.

CAMERA
PHOTOS
RADIO
ART DREAM
A BROWNIE CLUB OUTING
FOR SALE HERE
"MICKEY IS NOT A MOUSE. MICKEY IS GREAT ART" NUMBER TWO

There is another aspect to John's art that you have to visit his house/museum to see. He makes extremely clever sculptures out of found objects, usually wood turnings, and turns them into comic characters. I managed to pry one of these away from him, this stunning selection of lumber yard remnants, magically transformed into an awesome incarnation of KoKo the Clown. Only KoKo's face was actually carved by John. The rest is made of wood findings, pieces that he found, and brilliantly recycled.

Another example of both John's wit, and his ability to adapt found objects into his own unique creations, is "The Fuller Family", a sculpture he assembled from a selection of very fancy brushes. Even the brushes, themselves, are unique! Where does one see images, or brushes, like these?

Now for the Transformation! Looking at John's drawings, one could believe that he might be equally adept at teaching literature. They are so full of literary content, there is nearly as much to read, as there is to see. And, yet, this man taught art! He taught about form, and color, and all the stuff that belongs in art's domain. And, suddenly, John began to do paintings that were only about the visual, paintings that displayed his ability as a master of playing color games! All quips and quotes and verbal jokes were set aside, and John's humor and wit were transformed to visual jibes, playing with shapes, and distortion, and chromatic colors that made the eye go crazy with delight!

His first attempts were mild. He would choose a section of existing art and photograph it on an angle, then paint it on a canvas flat. Each canvas was three by four feet. He had a show of these at OK Harris, and it was very successful. He even rendered a section of a toy I made called, "Tricky Mickey". It looked exactly like the toy to me. John told me he was about to make me famous! Actually, Ivan Carp bought that painting, himself, for his own collection, and it, also, became the image he chose to advertise the show. Nonetheless, my promised fame failed to show up.

For his next act, John made a breakthrough, one that I thought was brilliant, and accounts for the fact that I now have a house full of these paintings. John discovered that a modern laser copying machine will create amazing, but natural, distortions if the original material is moved, while the copying is taking place. And if the subject matter is moved fast, the image will flip back upon itself. He would, then, study the distorted print, and extract from it an interesting area. And, this he rendered in acrylics, in wild and crazy chromatic colors, on canvases that again measured 3' by 4'. And so it was, these paintings became exercises in pure form and color, and John drew upon his knowledge, as a teacher of both design and color, to create paintings that were only about visual things, which in my opinion was, always, what painting ought to be. And the wilder the distortions, and more surprising the colors, the more exciting the work was to me.

The year that John's Most Amazing Show took place, my own doll, "Baby Face" was also being introduced. In fact, John's opening, and the first day of Toy Fair were on the exact same day, and only a few blocks away. John and Jacqui stayed at our house, and we all drove down together. Here we are at the opening, just before the crowds poured in.

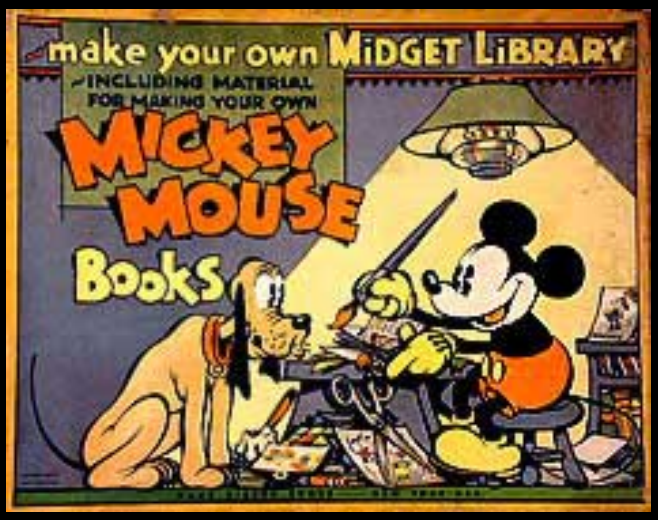
That was a terrible year for art. Karp complained that his gallery hadn't sold a single work all year. Ivan bought one of Johns paintings, for himself. But, afterwards, half the show came home to me. So, when my first Baby Face royalty check arrived, all of it went right to John. And I found myself with the largest single collection of John Fawcett's artwork in the USA. And I have never tired of looking at it, every day. I find John's art to be a perfect complement to the collection. It interjects a look that is bright and contemporary in character, that brightens the environment, without demanding ones undivided attention. The old and the new coexist harmoniously, and enhance each other.

Here is an example, with which I can demonstrate the effects of Chromatic Color, for those of you, to whom, the term is not familiar. Chromatic Colors are two radically different hues of the same value, which causes them to vibrate in the eye of the beholder.

This painting, I hate to admit, hangs in the bathroom. But, I love where it is placed. I get to stand before it, and admire it, every day, and, sometimes, even in the middle of the night. And one of the things that I enjoy is the way it changes, throughout the day, depending on the light, outside. And it, also, alters instantly, with the turning on and off of various lights, inside.

On a summer day, the green illumination of the forest seeps through the milk glass window, to bring out the shades of green, in the painting, dimly glowing, in the semi darkened room. When the florescent lights, above the sink, are on, as well as the incandescent spotlights, in the high ceiling, the painting is seen in its full color. But with just the florescent lights, alone, all the blues jump forth, and glow. On the other hand, with just the incandescent spotlights on, the painting comes vibrantly to life, with the red elements, emphasized, and giving off a fiery glow.

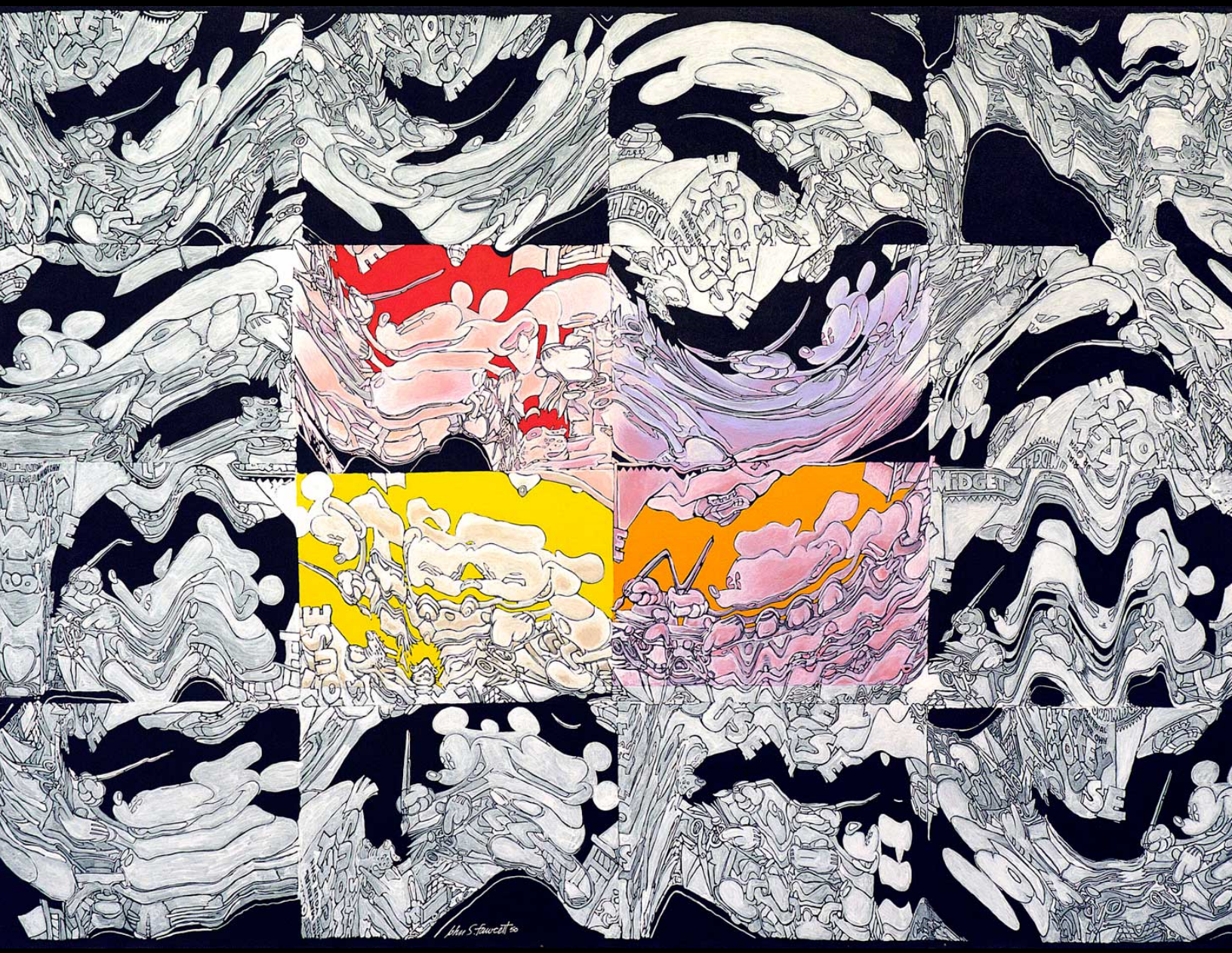
So, here they are, in no particular order, some of the many paintings that hang around the house. They are all form a series of an intended fifty canvasses. I don't know how many John, eventually, completed, but, there were many more than those I own. All of them are based on a single piece of art that, ironically, belongs to me. It is this box cover from the rare, and only known example of the Blue Ribbon "Mickey Mouse Midget Library". John is fascinated by images of Comic Characters making art. And thus, every painting in the series of fifty is a variation on this single image.



This first painting is the only one in the series that represents the traditional Mickey Colors. All the rest Go Wild!

PUSH

The last of these, is a most interesting piece. Here, John took the actual distorted copier sheets, and adhered them to the canvas, then, painted over each. This is most fascinating! Notice the way each panel seems to join with the ones adjacent to it, to create an overall flow. Oh, and I just made a wild discovery! I own more of the series of 50 than I ever realized! Looking at the back of this, just now, I see that John has written on it "MOUSE ART 18 - 33". Yeah! I wouldn't want to have to do 50 of these, either! The 60 pages of this web site were difficult enough! Way to go John! So here are 16 of the series, all on one canvas!



Below, is an odd painting that appealed to me. This is John in his more traditional mode, a painting he did between shows. It pays homage to the "KIX Atomic Bomb Ring," the Ultimate Radio Premium! I sat in the hall closet, for hours, in vain, many many years ago. My Atomic Bomb Ring, simply didn't glow! I guess I got this painting, as a kind of belated compensation.

And last of all, we come to the wall of the Great Hall. This group of six canvases form three complete paintings. Each set of two was intended to go together. And, all six, in their entirety, recreate the main wall of the OK Harris Gallery in 1990. This is, exactly, the way that they were shown, twenty-three years ago. Twenty-three years, that flew by, oh, so quickly. Over that time, both John and I grew old, but the paintings never did.

POPEYE
CRAYON SET
16 Colors
ATS PERFIK

SONNY HATFIELD

“Sonny” Hatfield adored toys, all toys, but none so much as the ones he made, himself. With guileless childlike honesty, he, more than once, remarked to me: “Mel, I have never seen toys more wonderful than the ones I make myself.”

I first met Sonny at a toy show, many years ago. Several friends allerted me, excitedly: “There’s a guy out in the parking lot, you’ve gotta meet!” So I went outside, reluctantly, as the show was in full swing. And there was Sonny Hatfield, seated at a card table, with a few of his hand carved “toys”, on display. That is how he saw them. They looked like ART to me, but they were, and would always be, just "toys," to him.

He was only showing them off. They were not for sale. Sonny was as open and enthusiastic as a little boy. He loved the things he carved, and he loved sharing them, along with a running commentary of what was going on in their tiny hand carved heads, as one after another, he brought them to life, with perfect touch and timing, by turning the large wooden crank on the side of each, just right.

Sonny was a happy-go-lucky guy, and as up-beat as any you could ever hope to meet. His Kentucky accent and demeanor were right out of central casting. He looked, and perfectly played, the role of a direct descendant of the legendary Hatfield Family of Hatfield and McCoy fame, for that, in fact, is what he was. He was also an amazing talent. Hiding beneath that folksy irresistibly compelling Appalachian exterior was a Creative Genius.

Horace on a bike was my first Sonny Hatfield toy. Little did either of us know how complex and spectacular they would become, later on. As time went by, Sonny’s toys grew more elaborate. But there is a charming simplicity to this one. The ball, on which Sonny has carved “Glendale to Beacon”, rotates on the tip of Horace’s finger, while he peddles the bike and tips his hat, dramatically. The toy, like Sonny, himself, is welcoming and friendly. Horace's head, balanced on a single wire, turns from side to side. There is no mechanism turning it. It is simply, as if, the whole thing is alive.

Hardin Marshall "Sonny" Hatfield was an extraordinary man. He was born in Glendale Kentucky, in 1931, and died there, on February 16, 2011. His body was discovered on the lawn of his self-built cabin, while four acres of his land and the barn were engulfed in flame. Thirty firefighters fought the blaze. Foul play was not suspected. I knew that Sonny had passed away. But I didn't learn the exact date and details, until today, when to make sure I had the facts straight, I looked him up on Google. I was surprised that there was so little there, obituaries, mostly. They speak about the fact that Sonny was a former building contractor, who owned the Glendale Antique Mall, started the "Depot Restaurant," and was a Korean War Air Force veteran, etc. They also informed me that his wife Marcie, who Eunice and I knew, and liked immensely, and whose maiden name, ironically, was "Disney", passed away, three years years before Sonny.

One obituary, embellished by Angela, one of Sonny's two daughters, mentioned that he was "a noted woodcarver." She stated that he was working on a hand-carved, hand-cranked, moving wooden horse-drawn carriage, driven by Mickey Mouse, just before he died. I know exactly what it was like. Sonny returned to favorite themes, time and time again

The next toy I acquired was Clarabelle the Cow. She dances so delightfully with a little jump in her step, stops, then, jumps again, and turns around. And, all the while, she rings the silver bells that Sonny fashioned out of tin.

To see Sonny operate the toys he made was a once in a lifetime experience. Each had only one means of animation a single crank somewhere on the side of the box it stood atop. But each crank had to be turned just right, and at a different perfect speed. There was no doubt about it, Sonny had a magic touch and he, alone, knew exactly how to make each one of his creations come to life.

With Sonny operating the crank, little “Ploo-Toe”, as Sonny pronounced his name, flew like the wind, while Mickey peddled madly, and Minnie rotated on her seat.

Sonny's running commentary was always a delight. When he got the pace just right, Tanglefoot would fly at lightning speed, or slow down to a leisurely trot, with Sonny delivering dialogue and storyline, in his inimitable Kentucky drawl, explaining what the toys, themselves, were thinking. Pluto jumping madly, from side to side in the rear of the cart, his eyes open wide, determined not to miss a single sight. Sony would describe the things he saw. This cart that Mickey is driving is not modeled after Disney. Sonny, himself, grew up, riding in one exactly like this, in real life. See how Tanglefoot's feet fly, his tail held high! Mickey's ride is rocky, due to an animated seat. He pulls back on the reigns, trying to keep Tanglefoot in tow. The wheels spin, wildly. I am still trying to figure out how Sonny got those spokes in there, and how they hold together, without glue.

Sonny was “The Wizard of Wood”. He could make it do incredible things. His works defy the very element, in fact, the only element that held them together. There is not a single drop of glue or adhesive used on any of these sculptures. Their many parts remain in place, due to an unknown force, called Gravity! I kid you not! The force that holds these works together is simply gravity. If you accidently turn one upside down, it will fall apart and scatter into all its separate pieces. That is exactly what happened to the most complex of these, the Mickey Band, coming up soon. Someone, not saying any names, tipped it over, accidently. It took me three days to put it back together again. And I still feel that, like all the Kings horses and all the Kings men, I didn’t get it quite right. Only Sonny, in person, could do that.

The fact that there is no glue used can sometimes be annoying. Popeye, below, loses his head in nearly every battle. The last time it fell off, with my diminishing eyesight, it took me half an hour to get it back on again. Finally, I gave in and placed a drop of glue on the tip of the wire it sits upon.

This elaborate scene is Amazing. Popeye and Bluto really go at it, in an all-out battle that makes the "Rock-em Sock-em Robots" look like sissies. Olive Oyle is going crazy, in a way only she can; her arms flaying wildly. You can almost hear her saying, OH! Popeye! Wimpy is eating lunch; isn’t he always? There is a hole in one of the corner posts, from which a little bird pops in and out. These boxers really pack a punch! The whole floor of the boxing ring rotates as Popeye and Bluto battle to the bitter end, which usually happens when Popeye loses his head. As a toy inventor and collector, I thought I knew a thing or two about toy mechanisms. The stuff that Sonny did is totally original. His wild solutions to creating complex motions were all his own invention, intuitive, and insanely unique.

There is another element that is amazing about these “Toys!” I wonder if you noticed it, or if you allowed yourself to be diverted. I am speaking of the fact that all the wires and rods that operate the figures are fully visible. They are so integrated into the totality that our mind accepts them, and our eye fails to detect them. The machinery that makes these automatons come to life, like the fully visible operators of Japanese Bunraku puppets, escapes our eyes.

What will escape our eyes, as well, is what’s inside the box. For the sake of space, and to help the oversized slide shows, here, operate, I have not shown the plain wooden boxes with a hand crank on one side that serve as bases for these works of art. I have seen Sonny open one of these up to make adjustments. The mechanisms are a tangle of complex craziness, all of which is based on intuition. What’s going on inside these boxes, would make Rube Goldberg blush.

All of the wood for all of the toys that Sonny made, over the years, came from one huge old table that he sawed up to harvest the precious perfect wood from which he carved all the tiny bits and pieces that made up a lifetime's worth of intricate figures, He used standard lumber to build the control boxes, and stained them to match.

This complex masterpiece is right out of the pages of Walt Disney’s, 1936 “Mickey Mouse A B C Story.” It represents the Cannibal Chief, first introduced in the cartoon, “Trader Mickey.” Sonny showed me one of these that he had made, and I asked if he would also make one for me. He often made duplicates of his favorite themes, and for better or worse, they never came out the same. Each successive one became either simpler or more complex, depending on the mood that he was in when he worked on it, or how the spirit moved him. In this case, it moved him in the right direction. On the version Sonny made for me that crazy creature, jumping up and down and turning around, on the chief’s head magically appeared, as did the little guy perched on one of his three toed feet. The first version I’d seen, just beat the drum. Lucky Me!

Sonny could work Magic simply by twisting a piece of wire slightly. By some uncanny trickery on the spectacular toy, below, he managed to get Clarabelle Cow to open wide, and hold the note, throughout a couple of beats, while everyone else moved in step. When this one fell into pieces, it was a miracle that I got Clarabelle to do that again. When these toys are in motion, it is almost impossible to take in all that is going on. Mickey, of course, plays the piano, but as he does so, the piano, itself, is jumping up and down. Atop it, Minnie Mouse is jumping, too, and turning around. Horace Horsecollar is playing the

Sony and Marcie created, owned, and ran a restaurant, and an Antique Mall. So he was not in need of funds. Nonetheless, he would supplement his income by selling these works of art, usually carved to order, for a growing circle of fans. But he so loved toys that when it came to me, he would accept no money, he insisted that I trade him toys, instead. And so I did, with great pleasure. What a delightful time we had. Sonny and Marcie came up to visit us several times. Once we all went to Brimfield together, Sonny Noel and I. Another time, we went to the JFK Toy Show. That happened to be the weekend of the Bil Baird auction, so Sonny and Marcie attended that with us as well. Sonny had a large toy collection and a Toy Museum, and loved just seeing and being at toy shows. We had a ball!

Writing this I have had to keep going back to change the verbs and context to past tense. It is so hard to accept the fact that Sonny is dead. He lives on through his children and grandchildren, I guess, and through the many works of art he created in his lifetime, and left behind. Sonny was a religious man, a member of Gilead Baptist Church. So, hopefully, he is living someplace else, as well. Sometime, on a summer day looking up into the sky, you might well see the work of Sonny Hatfield, floating by. Can you not imagine him, carving toys out of the clouds. Sony said it best: There are no toys in Heaven or Earth as wonderful as the ones he makes himself.

And so we come to the end of this PDF, chronicling the Birnkrant Collection, sometimes known as "Mouse Heaven." The fact that this PDF record exists is solely and simply due to my good friend ERIC MILLEN. Eric is an extraordinary person. He seeks out, and collects Great Art and Great Artists with all the gusto and that I once directed to discovering and collecting Comic Characters. And he shares his discoveries and enthusiasm with the public, on his dynamic Blog, "Massive Fantastic," at "massivefantastic.com".

I am honored to have been included there, even though, the work I did in the toy industry was never intended to be seen. More importantly, I am grateful that, through me, Eric discovered the much greater art and artists that flourished in the "Golden Age of Comic Characters." It was thanks to his insistence, help, guidance, tutelage and inspiration that this PDF exists. Eric is convinced that, through it, a record of the visual treasures in Mouse Heaven will continue to survive for posterity. The very fact that you are reading this is proof of his promise and his prophesy. Thank you, and THANK YOU, Eric.

Sincerely, Mel Birnkrant

Continue to

VOLUME FOUR

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